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**Children's Construction of Gender and National Identities
with respect to Preschool Policy and Practice: A Case Study
of Two Preschool Classrooms in Turkey**

By

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Abstract

Children engage with diverse policies and practices in early years institutions. The aim of this study is to show how this relationship plays a part in children's construction of gender and national identities. Identity construction is a complex and ongoing process that involves both the individual themselves and others. In this process what identities schools offer and how children interpret these identities in their making meaning of themselves is the main concern of this research. Therefore it is important to understand which discourses are available for children and how they reproduce or challenge them to perform their identities. In order to understand these complex relations, this research was conducted in two preschool classrooms in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, during a six-month period of fieldwork with intervals. The data were gathered from classroom observations, interviews with forty-seven children aged 4-5, two preschool teachers, two head teachers and two assistants of head teachers, as well as an analysis of curriculum and some policy documents.

The analyses reveal that most of the time children follow and reproduce dominant discourses that are available to them. While children try to do their gender right by performing hegemonic masculinity and emphasising femininity forms, the dominant national discourse, Atatürk nationalism, is used by children to do their national identity right. However it was also found that children are aware that doing their identities right brings them advantages and by knowing this some children take risks to perform other ways of being. Conducting the fieldwork in two classrooms showed how the approaches and ideas of teachers and schools influence children's staying within or crossing boundaries in their identity construction. It is safe to say that the children tended to follow the dominant discourses of the teachers' approaches and ideas in terms of certain ways of being. At this point the Turkish education system aims to make the Other into the Same (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) rather than offering and welcoming other ways of being.

Abbreviations

AKP – The Justice and Development Party

DAP – Developmentally Appropriate Practices

ECE- Early Childhood Education

MoNE – Ministry of National Education

TC –Turkish Republic

TRT- The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation

Introduction

The enrolment rates in early years' services indicate that more and more children have been attending these services in recent years. Worldwide, almost 124 million children were enrolled in pre-primary education in 2004, an increase of 10.7% from 1999 (UNESCO, 2007:20), and in 2009 the number increased to more than 157 million children (ILO, 2012). According to UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2007), pre-primary enrolment rates have increased significantly in diverse regions around the world. Also, the recent trends illustrate that in Western countries the attendance level for early childhood services is close to 90% for 5-6 year olds (OECD, 2012). Cost-effectiveness analyses and research reports have also been published to emphasise the importance of early years education (OECD, 2006). Models such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study and Sure Start have been designed to test how early years education can be used as a future investment (UNESCO, 2007). According to Nobel Prize winning economist Heckman, every dollar invested in early childhood services provides for the future and benefits society in return. Heckman and Masterov (2007:6) point out that early intervention programmes targeted toward disadvantaged children are cost effective. Their estimated rates of return of are 16%: 4% for participants and 12% for society at large.

In line with these worldwide trends, the number of early childhood institutions, early years teachers and schooling rates continued to increase in the 2000s in Turkey (Derman & Basal, 2010). The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has assigned more importance to early years education in its strategic plans to increase these

schooling rates. Governmental, non-governmental and international organisations have carried out projects like UNICEF's 'Strengthening Preschool Education Project' (2012). Despite early years' education having a higher priority in the Turkish government's agenda, the new education reform focuses more on primary and secondary education than on early years. The new education system was accepted in March 2012 and applied in the 2012–2013 school year. While politicians proudly announced the introduction of twelve years of compulsory education by claiming that this enables flexibility in the education system (MoNE, 2012), many scholars and policymakers seem worried about its possible consequences for a declining early childhood schooling rate and for the quality of early childhood education (ERG, 2012). On the other hand, the recent trends show that early years schooling rates are still increasing; they reached 53% for the ages of 5 and 41% for the age of 4-5 in the 2014-2015 school year (MoNE, 2015).

The increasing numbers of institutions and rising enrolment rates around the world and in Turkey demonstrate that early years institutions have been given more attention in recent years. However, Dahlberg and Moss (2005:vi) warn that this expansion of early years services may cause new problems because it may lead to greater and more effective governing of children and also more provision will be accompanied by more uniformity and normalisation of thought and practice. Hence it is important to understand what happens inside these institutions. While these institutions can be places in which differences and diversities are encouraged, they can also be places for perpetuating injustice, in particular, through structural domination and oppression (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005:2).

Early years settings play a vital role in children's identity construction. In the identification process, children engage with people and culturally available discourses in their everyday lives. Early years settings are places in which children learn about themselves and others. Identities have been treated as fixed, static and binary in the early childhood education field, due to the domination of developmental psychology which aims to control the social order by constructing and prompting binary positions like girl/boy, adult/child and good/bad (MacNaughton, 2005). However, in recent years studies have attempted to understand identities beyond these dualities to show that there are multiple identities that are fluid and discursively negotiated (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). It has also been recognised that children play an active role in the construction of their identities and that they are competent at reading the meanings around them, which leads them to identify which positions are discouraged or encouraged (Davies, 2003).

This study argues that children's gender and national identities are constructed in the discursive practices of early years settings. Gender identities have been the subject of previous early childhood education studies. Feminist poststructuralist theory has been adapted by scholars to explain gendered school practices and children's usage of these practices (Davies, 2003; MacNaughton, 2000; Yelland, 1998). On the other hand, the construction of national identities has received little attention in the early childhood education field (Lappalainen, 2006), although some research has investigated older children's national identity construction in secondary and high schools (Howard & Gill, 2001; Durrani & Dunne, 2010). There are few studies that focus on the interactive relation between children and early years institutions to understand the complex process of identity construction. Hence, the purpose of this

study is to combine the influence of children and preschool settings in the construction of children's gender and national identities.

In this thesis I argue that early years' practices in Turkey draw boundaries between certain national and gender subjectivities and children's identities are shaped by these practices. However, children do not merely follow the discourses around them; rather they reproduce or resist the meanings in relation to their own interests and understandings.

In order to explore the above issues I conducted research in two preschool classrooms in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. Since I sought to obtain in-depth understanding of the construction of gender and national identities in preschools, I chose two state schools closely to engage with the national education system. As all state preschools are part of the same standardised education system in Turkey, it was convenient for me to access these schools. This case study involves 47 children aged between 4 and 6, two preschool teachers, two teaching assistants, two head teachers and two assistants of head teachers. In these settings, I used interview, observation and document analysis methods to answer the following research questions:

1. How do gender and national identities manifest themselves in early years' policies and practices?
2. How do children use the early years' curriculum and practices in the creation of their understandings of gender and national identities?

Personal Interest in the Research

The reason why I have chosen this field of study relates to my personal background. I grew up in a middle-class family and my parents gave education prime importance.

‘We have nothing but education to survive in this life’ was my father’s classic statement to encourage my brother and me to study. My mother, a housewife, closely monitored and helped our studies by ensuring that the conditions were suitable for studying. My parents felt strongly about their children’s education. Therefore, any investments were made for a better education. After spending eighteen years in the Turkish education system, I trained to become an early childhood education teacher and my brother became a civil engineer. We did not disappoint our parents. We went to ‘good’ schools and we obtained ‘decent’ degrees. Then, without experiencing any teaching, I won a scholarship from the Ministry of National Education to study for a Master’s and doctoral degree abroad. This was a turning point in my life because by accepting this scholarship I chose a career in academia. When I have finished all my studies I will go back to Turkey and work in a university as a lecturer.

In 2010, I started my Master’s degree in Childhood in Society at the University of Warwick. Coming from Turkey to study in the UK made me realise that national and gender identities are very important aspects of life. Although I thought that my or other people’s nationalities and gender were not important, I understood that the issue is more complex. Having the chance to compare two societies I started to think that embedded meanings of gender and nationhood construct our identities every day. We receive messages about what being Turkish women or British men should or should not be from diverse sources like family, media and schools. As a white Turkish woman in the UK I was not the same person I was in Turkey because I have different resources to construct my meanings. However, this construction is not free from my previous experiences.

It was surprising to see that what I had learnt in school had significantly shaped who I am. Then I translated this curiosity to my research. I was particularly interested in the preschool period due to my bachelor's study. During my four-year teacher training course, children's gender and national identities were not the main issues because of the domination of the developmental framework and its approach to children, which see them as not yet having their national or gender identities. However, based on my internship experiences in a number of institutions, I encountered diverse practices where children became a part of gendered and nationalist activities. I decided closely to observe this period in children's lives to see what happens inside these classrooms. Having a sociological perspective rather than an educational one opened up possibilities to go beyond dualities in terms of identity categories and at the same time to see how we all try to fix ourselves into those categories. This thesis is also a personal journey; I went back to a path that I followed in my early years, but this time I was there with a different self.

Outlining the Structure of Thesis

This thesis consists of six main chapters. In Chapter 1, I discuss relevant literature about children's national and gender identity construction in early years' settings. After briefly exploring the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of identity, I present the construction of binary positions in dominant practices and set out how recent studies in the field of early childhood education challenge these dominant frameworks by offering multiple subject positions. Then I present studies that discuss school policies and practices, including curriculum, teachers and classroom materials in the construction of gender identities. I also bring into the picture children's constructions of their identities in the school context. A similar structure will be

followed to discuss relevant literature on national identities by focusing on the perspectives of schools and children.

The second chapter describes the early childhood education context in Turkey. There are two main parts in this chapter. The first part describes the current structure of early year institutions, particularly preschools, by focusing on the curriculum, the schooling rate, the teachers and classroom settings. In the second part of the chapter I discuss the crucial place of gender and nationalism in the creation of ideal citizens in the Turkish education system. By presenting these features I also deal with the socio-economic transformation of Turkey.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion about the methodological issues of the present study. In this chapter I firstly outline how and why the qualitative paradigm was chosen in relation to the aims and research questions of the study. The next sections introduce the research design process, the context and the facilities of researched schools, which I refer to as ‘Nar’ and ‘Mavi’, access and consent issues and the methods of research, including participant observation, interviews and document analysis. The chapter continues to explore the data gathering process and data analysis and the final sections address reflexivity and ethical considerations.

The fourth and fifth chapters present the findings of the research. The gender identity findings are explored in Chapter 4 through a discussion of the gender discourses of preschool settings, which are presented by examining the policies and practices of Nar and Mavi. The chapter then argues that children’s construction of the boy and girl categories is opposed to the other category and different. It examines the conditions in which gender integration occurs, and how children stay within and cross gender boundaries. Chapter 5 similarly focuses first on the national identity

discourses in the two settings. This is followed by children's engagement with these discourses, which is mainly constructed based on what is referred to as 'Atatürk nationalism'.

The analyses from the previous chapters are brought together in Chapter 6 through a discussion of the research and the answers to the research questions. Three main issues are discussed in this chapter. In this first part I deal with the gender and national positions that are constructed in Nar and Mavi. The second section explores the differences between the applications of the two preschool settings in the construction of these positions. The last part focuses on the necessity of involving children in their identity formation process by looking at the limitations they have and their agency to interpret and position themselves.

The final chapter gives a brief summary of the answers to the research questions, the contribution to the existing literature, the limitations of the research and recommendations for further studies.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

This chapter explores some of the existing literature on children's construction of gender and national identities in early childhood education settings. The chapter proposes an argument which underlines both the role of children's interpretation of their gender and national identities and the role of preschool policy and practices, including curriculum, teachers, classroom materials and settings (toys, books, homecorner and block corner). I will first examine the relationship between children's identities and early childhood education by looking at how dominant practices tend to 'make the Other into the Same' (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) and how some scholars have challenged these practices by 'recognising the Other as different' (Rinaldi, 2006). Due to the underrepresentation of intersection of gender and nationalism in early year settings, in the following sections gender identity and national identity will be presented. The gender section will first present literature on the place of gender in early years settings based on policies, curriculum, teachers' approaches, classroom materials, homecorner and block corner. It will then examine how children construct their gender identities by using gender dichotomy, seeing boys and girls as opposites and challenging gender norms. In the national identity section, how schools emphasise the 'us and them' division implicitly and explicitly will be examined. Finally I will outline children's national identity as a structural and discursive construction by demonstrating children's engagement with national discourses.

1.2 Children's Identities in Early Childhood Education

Jenkins (1996:3) gives two basic dictionary meanings of identity: one is 'a concept of absolute sameness' and the other is 'a concept of distinctiveness'. These two definitions of identity demonstrate the comparison between individuals in terms of their sameness and difference. Individual sameness that is shared with others or difference from others allows the individual to answer the questions of 'who am I?' or 'who am I not?'. Therefore identity refers to a dynamic relationship between an individual and others. Mead and Morris (1934) discuss people's interactions with others to understand the self. According to Mead and Morris (1934), language serves as a prime symbol that allows people to communicate and interact with each other. In this interaction, how one acts is closely related to how others respond to this act. In other words, the imagination of the self in other people's minds shapes what the self is.

Similarly, Goffman (1959) focuses on how people communicate with each other by looking particularly at everyday interactions. He uses theatrical terms to explain how one acts in the presence of others. Goffman (1959) argues that what society expects from the individual shapes the performance of actors and consequently an actor tries to fulfil stereotyped expectations. Woodward (2000:18) points out that according to Goffman, agency refers to a 'negotiation of roles; we can interpret the parts we play and structure refers to the parts or scripts that have already been written for the roles we play'. In this sense, the self arises from the complex relationship between the individual and structure in Goffman's dramaturgical analogy.

It has been stated that identity construction should be understood as an active process between individuals and structures (Jenkins, 1996; Tormey, 2006). Woodward

(2000) points out that while social structures limit individuals' acts, agency gives individuals freedom to act. Giddens (1991) claims that identity construction is a reflexive process in which individuals are aware of their choices and limitations. Therefore, for this study, the concept of identity refers to a complex and active process created by actors in relation to others. Also, identities are socially constructed through power relations; an individual can be powerful or powerless according to his/her particular conditions (Walkerdine, 1990). MacNaughton, Davis and Smith (2009:31) suggest three ideas about identity to comprehend power relations in social contexts which will guide this study as well:

- Identity is chosen not fixed; it is therefore changeable.
- Identity is formed in and through discourse and therefore identity choices are limited or made possible through discourse.
- Identity is actively performed, not passively given.

Another important point needs to be raised here because children are mostly seen as powerless in their identity construction. Children as language learners are seen as incomplete. From Mead and Morris perspective, 'the child has no definite character, no definite personality' (Mead & Morris, 1934:159). According to Mead and Morris, children develop their identities through play and games, through which they achieve a whole self. Children take different roles such as mother, father, police, teacher, dog, etc. in play, in which they continue the conversation of gestures – communicating without knowing – by imitating different characters. In play 'he has a set of stimuli which call out in himself the sort of responses they call out in others' (Mead & Morris, 1934:151). On the other hand, through games, the group relations

come into the scenario because the roles are already written and the child can play them to fulfil others' expectations. The rules can be changed in games but the point is that 'there is a set of responses of such others so organised that the attitude of one calls out the appropriate attitudes of the other' (Mead & Morris, 1934:150). It can be interpreted that while play is exercising individual agency, games work as a structure that reminds those playing of the shared codes and values.

However, play and games are more than structural forms in which children develop their identities. In that sense, Mead and Morris oversimplify social relations without recognising the ongoing power relations; rather they see them as merely the result of human nature (Jenkins, 1996). Contrary to Mead and Morris, this study does not see an adult as a whole self and a child as an incomplete self. Despite the fact that they have differences and different dependencies, this study approaches children's identities same as adults' identities. Both children and adults have choices to make with regard to their actions, but at the same time there are limitations and restrictions around them that lead them to act in certain ways.

Undoubtedly, early childhood institutions are not the only places in which children create and recreate their identities. Identity construction starts from birth: the cultural and social environments within which children grow up play crucial roles in shaping children's identities. According to Göncü (1999), in order to understand children's identity formation, it is necessary to consider the process of socialisation and how children engage with their culture. The home and family environments are the first places where children start to construct their meanings; therefore, children come to institutions with their experiences already shaped by domestic environments. While the transition between home and school was the subject of some scholars (Göncü, et

al. 2007; Brooker, 2006), in particular, this study aims to understand identity construction in education, which requires an exploration of what identities schools offer and how children interpret these identities in creating the self-image of themselves.

Early childhood education is generally defined as providing care and education for children aged 0–7 in public and private institutions before they start compulsory schooling. The starting age for compulsory schooling varies. For instance, in the UK, children start school at the age of 5, in Peru and the Netherlands at the age of 6 and in South Africa and Sweden at the age of 7 (The World Bank, 2013). Hence, early childhood education and care start from birth but end at different ages. This includes services like children's centres, crèches, preschools, kindergartens and nurseries. There are practical and theoretical differences between these services. For example, crèches look after children of a younger age and preschools prepare children for compulsory schooling. Despite these differences, I will use the terms 'early childhood institution', 'early childhood education' and 'early years setting' interchangeably for all of these services throughout the text.

Despite children engaging with early years practices in their identity construction, early childhood institutions are mostly seen as places where children can be shaped by diverse policies and practices (Apple, 2001). The idea of securing the future by shaping children stems from modernist thinking. In the following section I shall discuss how dominant practices of early childhood education see children as tabula rasas that can be shaped by early intervention. How these dominant approaches and their image of children have been critiqued will then be presented. While needy, incompetent and passive images of children in the dominant approaches have been

challenged by the competent, capable and active child images, early childhood institutions are not seen as singular knowledge producers, but rather as spaces in which to encourage children to think diversely and differently (Moss & Petrie, 2002). However, despite the dominant approaches being challenged in the last two decades by the notion that we need to understand children in their own terms, early years' policies and practices still aim to create their desired identities.

1.2.1 Fixed Identities in Dominant Approaches

Education systems are still (re)producing their traditional practices to create future citizens (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). The strong place of the developmental approach in early childhood education is proof of this claim. Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) were introduced by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in Bredekamp's 1987 book *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*. This approach has been applied around the world regardless of the historical, political and economic conditions of the respective countries and children.

Having roots in developmental psychology, Piaget's cognitive development theory is the influential scientific approach in DAP. In a general sense, according to this theory, children are expected to behave in certain ways at particular ages. Children make linear progress through to adulthood by following predetermined paths. According to DAP, teachers are responsible for guiding children's development in four learning areas: cognitive, language, social/emotional and physical (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In other words, children are expected to follow particular stages to develop their identities by engaging with DAP.

Although Piaget's contribution to the theory of knowledge has been recognised in the field, its application to early childhood education has been found to be harmful (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). First of all, the dominant practices are based on the belief that 'there are particular truths determined even before a person's life begins, that apply to all human beings' (Cannella, 2002:58). This positivistic approach decontextualises and universalises the definition of children based on Euro- and US-centric theories. As a result, there are no differences between, for example, Korean and Swedish children. However, even in the same cities, children live very different lives due to their complex cultural and economic backgrounds.

Secondly, the scientific approach categorises children in a normative way. Developmental assumptions identify what children should or should not do and when children behave as expected, they are considered normal; when they do not, they are considered abnormal. This idea brings forth the idea of normalisation and consequently 'we find ourselves talking and doing certain things as if they were natural and obvious, rather than the product of particular power relations' (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005:17). As an object of normalisation, children are measured and assessed by early childhood institutions. Undoubtedly, being normal carries great importance for children with regard to being accepted by others. In other words, the norms of school influence the construction of the self. Otherwise there is the danger of exclusion. However, these practices already exclude some children because the image of the child in the developmental approach is mainly a Euro-American middle-class image (Cannella, 2002). Hence it marginalises 'others' who do not fit this image.

In this sense, while some groups are privileged, some are not in child development. A modernist understanding of the world emphasise a hierarchy in dualities like us/them, good/bad, adult/child or female/male. While dominant practices prioritise and privilege one part of these binaries, social inequality is inevitable. Adult-child relations in the dominant approach are closely related to these kinds of divisions. It has been discussed in the sociology of childhood that seeing children as becoming and adults as being places children at the lower level of the hierarchy (Lee, 1998) because adults as complete beings are seen as superior to children. In that sense, teachers are seen as knowledge holders, and children are always under the control of adults' protection in early years settings. Based on this inferior position, we (adults) rationalise our continued surveillance of the children (Cannella, 2002:62). This view conceptualises children as powerless and needy.

The child-centred curriculum that arose from developmental theory seems to change the position of children by putting them at the centre (Cannella, 2002). These practices stem from the works of Dewey, Froebel, Rousseau and Montessori in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Basically, children engage with classroom activities based on their choices and interests and play is an important way of learning in these practices. When children are ready, they naturally learn what is best for them and therefore the teacher's role is that of a supporter rather than a knowledge dictator. However, the criticism is that this approach also embodies a modernist way of thinking. Cannella (2002) points out that child-centredness has the same universal understanding of children and like DAP it assumes that its practices are suitable for all children. Also Cannella (2002:120) claims that self-governance and individual choice in a child-centred curriculum are an illusion that 'denies the diverse and limited contexts in which individuals live within one democratic

society’. In the developmental approach, child-centred pedagogy favours middle-class views as well. Cannella (2002:129) states that ‘middle class children may be free to develop an independence through which they resist standardisation by outside forces, because they are already members of a culture of power’.

As two mainstream approaches in early childhood education, DAP and child-centred pedagogies attach importance to children’s development and learning to achieve desired ends. The contribution of developmentalism to the field of early childhood education should not be underestimated. It is a truism to state that developmental psychology has provided insights into children’s interactions with the world by providing explanations of how nature and past experiences shape the present and future life of a child. However, these approaches also leave unanswered questions of diversity and difference. Along the same lines as Cannella, Dahlberg and Moss clearly summarise these two perspectives’ common understandings regarding early childhood education:

*All work with fixed categories and classificatory systems define, assess and normalise children – whether these categories and systems are expressed in terms of development, standards or grades and practised through observations, portfolios, tests or exams. All, in short, **make the Other into the Same** and remove the possibility of otherness, through the exercise of power and grasping the child. The tactics (or methods) may differ, but the basic assumptions are the same. (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005:95-96, emphasis added)*

1.2.2 Challenging Dominant Approaches

Many scholars in the early childhood education field have challenged the dominant frameworks (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001;

MacNaughton, 2005; Moss & Petrie, 2002). The construction of early childhood education has been rethought and discussed by contesting the universalist understanding of truth in these scholars' studies. More importantly, the image of children in these institutions has been questioned and their own role in their identity construction has been introduced by the notion of children's agency. Cannella (2005:19) points out that this work, which could be labelled as cultural, feminist, critical and at times postmodern, opens doors leading to new spaces and positions from which fields like early childhood education can be reconceptualised.

It has been emphasised that there are socially constructed children and childhoods rather than universal definitions for children and childhoods as the dominant practices claim (James & Prout, 1997). This understanding opens up many possibilities with regard to seeing children from diverse backgrounds. Moss and Petrie (2002) claim the necessity of taking diversity one step further by seeing children as having multiple identities and that child identity is not constructed independently but rather in relation to other socially constructed identities like gender, ethnicity and nationality. Also, children's role in shaping their identities has been recognised:

*Children are and must be seen as active in the construction of their own lives,
the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live.
Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.*
(James and Prout, 1997:8)

The modern period has been challenged by the idea of there being many truths and knowledge. Whereas modernist ideas are seen as narrow and restrictive with regard to how they see diversities and differences, postmodernist ideas suggest opening up

possibilities to understand the complex and changing nature of the world. Postmodernity emerged at the end of the twentieth century with new ways of understanding the world to challenge modernity (Moss & Petrie, 2002):

From a postmodern perspective, there is no absolute knowledge, no absolute reality waiting 'out there' to be discovered. There is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that exists outside history or society that can provide foundations for truth, knowledge and ethics. (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 2007:23)

Despite the argument that modernity and postmodernity seem to be the opposite of one another, it is difficult to understand these as two separate periods due to their interrelated relations. In today's world, modernist ideas still maintain their practices and it is hard to claim that postmodern ideas suddenly appeared in a certain period. Hence Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) suggest that using the postmodernity concept does not mean dismissing all of the works within modernity. This study concurs with this view as it does not aim to be restricted by the modernity/postmodernity duality in trying to understand their influences on children and early childhood education; rather it finds the discussion of modernity and postmodernity vital because, as Moss and Petrie (2002) point out, knowledge is a base in the relation of children and early years provision and it is defined differently by them: modernity defines it as an objective entity, whereas postmodernity defines it as a perspective.

Understanding these different perspectives creates the opportunity to understand how they appear in early years settings and children's lives. To do so some scholars have benefited from the works of Foucault and have applied postmodern and

poststructuralist ideas to the early childhood education field to question dominant practices (Davies, 2003; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; MacNaughton, 2005) by using, in particular, his concepts of ‘power’ and ‘regime of truth’. Power plays a central role in shaping the individual self in Foucault’s understanding but not always in a negative and oppressive way:

.. it (power) needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault & Gordon, 1980:119)

Power is used by both individuals and institutions to reveal their norms and truths. Foucault and Gordon (1980) claim that every society has its regime of truth, which determines what needs to be done, or not done, and what is acceptable or not acceptable. MacNaughton (2005:30) claims that the ‘regime of truth has both political and ethical substance: its truths establish power relations that imply ethical choices about how to engage with them’. For instance, in early years settings, child development knowledge generates a regime of truth and determines what is true or wrong. The curriculum and teachers are expected to convey a regime of truth with diverse practices in school settings. However, children do not take a passive place in power relations; therefore, they are not seen as mere followers of the regime of truth, even though they are targeted by governments and experts whose aim is to govern them.

As an alternative to the dominant frameworks, the Reggio Emilia pedagogy has been introduced in the literature (Rinaldi, 2006). This approach sees children in relation to their historical, political and economic contexts. The central tenet in Reggio Emilia is listening to children and it encourages hearing a ‘hundred languages of childhood’

(Rinaldi, 2006:19). Dahlberg and Moss (2005:100) explain what a listening pedagogy is:

To listen means being open to the Other, recognising the Other as different and trying to listen to the Other from his or her own position and experience and not treating the Other as the same.

In this approach, children are seen as knowledge constructors that engage with the world. Learning is not a one-way process in which children are filled with knowledge; rather children contribute to their learning actively. This understanding sees the child as a 'rich child' who is open to learn diversities and differences. Although the image of the rich child is now on the agenda of some early childhood institutions, the dominant framework, with its emphases on economic and political future benefits, still maintains a powerful place in many institutions. Neoliberal politics have also occupied a considerable place in early years education by contributing to restricting children's experiences by singular understandings (Kjorholt & Qvortrup, 2012; Perez & Cannella, 2011). As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis cost-effective plans see early years' institutions as investment area. Economic rationality in these kinds of plans has come to dominate the education field. A market approach in education has appeared to become the dominant norm for creating standards to promise quality for all by positioning children and parents as consumers (Lee, 2012:31). The illusory existence of freedom in neoliberalism has been debated in the field; despite these policies often talking about freedom, democracy and equity concepts, governments continue to centralise and standardise their education systems (Moss, 2014). Consequently, children need to be fitted into certain categories. If this cannot be done, the system

does not take responsibility; rather it is seen as the failure of individuals such as parents and teachers.

1.3 Gender and National Identities in Early Childhood Education

Now I would like to move to gender and national identities in these dominant and alternative approaches of early years institutions. Early years institutions are the spaces where children access diverse discourse in the creation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ categories based on gender, race, nation, economic and religious differences. This study particularly focuses on how gender and national identity categories are offered in preschools since both always occupy a place in educational systems with the aim of creating desired citizens such as Turkish, British or Malaysian men and women. Previous studies of the intersection of gender and national identities in schools have not dealt with early years institutions. Rather there are studies which focus on gender and national identities separately; therefore: in the following section, the identities offered by early years policies and practices and children’s engagement with them will be discussed, firstly in terms of gender and then in terms of national identities.

1.3.1 Gender Identity

There are a number of studies that aim to understand how children construct their gender identities in early childhood education. I will first present how gender identities are offered in school settings by focusing on policies, curriculum, teachers and materials. Then children’s engagement with these elements in the construction of gender identities will be discussed.

1.3.1.1 Early Years Policies and Curriculum

Gender equity policies in education have been occupying a place on the agendas of governments and NGOs since the 1980s to challenge gender inequality. On the other hand, there have not been many projects that particularly concern early childhood education (Martinez, 1998). Alloway (1995, cited in Martinez, 1998) attributes the absence of early years in policies to the fact that children are seen as too young to engage with gender discourses; also, due to their informal curriculum of early years education, it is not possible to impose a certain knowledge. It can be said that there have been some changes since the time in which Alloway (1995, cited in Martinez, 1998) posited these reasons because early intervention has been assigned more importance with regard to investing in the future and gender equity is one of the issues from which governments cannot escape because of their commitment to the conventions of worldwide organisations. However, it is hard to claim that the universalist approach of international organisations and government policies can offer better understandings about gender in early childhood education (ECE) since they are based on certain knowledge and truths.

Gender silence in the developmental approach plays a part in reproducing gender separation and inequality in classrooms (Surtees & Gunn, 2010). This silence stems from the belief that children develop their gender identities naturally. The Reggio Emilia and Montessori approaches offer gender-neutral practices in which children engage with activities regardless of their gender. These approaches encourage children to be involved in both masculine and feminine activities. These approaches see girls and boys as equal and while boys can play with dolls, girls are expected to engage with blocks.

However, according to Browne (2004) this gender-neutral approach fails to recognise the existing unequal power relations between girls and boys. Browne (2004) emphasises that although the Reggio Emilia approach aims to attach value to diversities and differences, its practices are unaware of the reproduction of gendered understandings in classrooms. Browne observed Reggio Emilia early years institutions in 2003 and she witnessed a couple of scenes in which ‘the children seem to understand themselves through the traditional discourse of masculinity and femininity’ and adults do not concern themselves with these understandings (Browne, 2004:53). However it is difficult to underestimate the efforts of Reggio Emilia approach since this approach is generally proposed as an alternative approach to the dominant frameworks in early years education.

1.3.1.2 Teachers

Beyond the curriculum and policies teachers are at the centre of ECE because their interpretation of curriculum and policies shapes classroom practices. Most of the studies concerning the influence of early years practices on children’s gender identities focus on teachers’ approaches to gender and the reflection of their views in classroom practices. MacNaughton (2000) carried out action research with twelve Anglo-Australian early years educators - including herself - for a gender equity project. During an eighteen-month period she found that the ‘regime of truth’ led teachers to consider the ‘developing child’ and the teacher’s role and responsibility towards the ‘developing child’ (MacNaughton, 2000:6). Seeing gender as a biological fixed end was one of the main obstacles that shaped teachers’ restricted way of seeing gender in MacNaughton’s study. Similarly, Robinson and Diaz (2006) found that teachers’ understanding of gender is primarily based on biological

determinism and even when they started to talk about gender as a social structure, at the end of their conversation they reduced it to natural ways of being a girl or a boy.

On the other hand, in Browne's (2004) study, the majority of the 75 early years educators from London nurseries believed that children learn their gender roles as a result of their socialisation process. However, Browne felt it important to point out that despite only a quarter of teachers thinking that differences between boys and girls are innate, in the 1980s and early 1990s, fewer teachers claimed to have this view. Browne (2004) points out that when teachers tried to reconstruct classroom settings to achieve gender equity in the 1980s and 1990s, they realised that children continued to engage with gender stereotypical activities. This led teachers to give up their belief in the socialisation process and they started to think biology determine children's behaviours. This situation was also observed in another study carried out by MacNaughton (1998). A teacher called Fay tried to reorganise the block corner and homecorner areas to prevent gender division in these areas. After four months of Fay's observation of, and intervention in, these spaces she realised that the girls and boys had created new ways to play separately and gender division in the spaces continued. MacNaughton (1998) attributes Fay's failure to her way of seeing identity formation. Fay believed that children form their gender identity by observing and doing what they are told. MacNaughton (2000:19) calls this understanding the sponge model of identity formation because children are expected to soak up the social environment around them.

It can be said that teachers' beliefs are important with regard to providing gender equality in early years settings. For instance, it has been found that teachers who believe in traditional gender views tend to use gendered practices in their classrooms

(Aina & Cameron, 2011). In particular, gender dichotomy in the language of teachers tends to separate girls and boys in managing the classroom through the use of statements like 'boys sit down' or 'girls play quietly' (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992). Also, to praise children's maturity, some teachers use gendered language like 'good girl' and 'big boy' etc. (Thorne, 1993). It is common to hear these kinds of statements in early years settings since gendered language is normalised in everyday practices.

Moreover, masculine and feminine activities are separated rigidly from the point of view of teachers; while boys are expected to be 'physically active' and to enjoy engaging with 'complex tasks', girls are seen as 'chatty, calm and nurturing' and as engaging with 'daily tasks'. Based on this binary understanding, Woodward (2003, cited in Paechter, 2007) found that masculine-labelled activities are valued more by teachers and children because these activities are more complex and interesting than feminine-labelled activities. Also, Skelton (2001, cited in Paechter 2007) observed that some teachers found it difficult to handle boys due to their 'active and rough nature'; therefore, the teachers did not want to challenge boys and consequently boys achieved their wants more than girls. Moreover, boys are permitted to use more space in the classroom, use aggressive tones when speaking to their peers and teachers and disobey rules (Walkerdine, 1989; Paechter, 2007).

On the other hand, recent studies have invited early years teachers to veer away from the dominant practices by using feminist poststructuralist, poststructuralist and queer theories (Tobin, 1997; MacNaughton, 2000; Blaise & Andrew, 2005; Blaise & Taylor, 2012) because seeing gender neither as biological construction nor as socialisation process opens up possibilities to see children's diverse understandings and engagements with gender. Using feminist structuralist concepts of discourse,

power and subjectivity have been found useful to see gender as socially constructed and not as an essential biological process (MacNaughton, 2000:238). Children do not merely follow and play out their gender roles; they are aware of existing norms and they do not position themselves in a fixed way. On the other hand, queer theories claim that it is not possible to think about gender without thinking about sexualities and the dominant gender stereotypes are based on heterosexual norms. In order to understand these gender stereotypes, it is necessary to consider the inseparable relation between the dominant gender discourses and the dominant discourse of heterosexuality (Blaise & Taylor, 2012:92).

Blaise and Andrew (2005) took the risk of challenging developmentally appropriate practice even though this might have led them to being seen as ‘bad’ teachers. But, they asked, ‘how “bad” can it be?’ Andrew, a male preschool teacher in Australia and Mindy, a female early childhood educator in the US, worked together to challenge conventional teaching experiences in early childhood settings. They believed that ‘children know about gender discourses and gender norms, and how to use them to construct femininities and masculinities in their everyday lives’ (2005:50). In Andrew’s classroom, the children played a game called ‘The Sex Game’. In this game, children touch, kiss each other on the lips, eyes and nose and pretend to take their underwear off. They call this process ‘sexing’. When Yarrow witnessed this game he did not intervene to stop them, but rather he used it as an opportunity to talk with the children about gender and sexuality. In their discussion the children were keen to talk about, and listen to others talking about, this subject. Yarrow felt that by talking about this game, he participated in it and risked being regarded as a ‘bad’ teacher due to the fact that he preferred to face the discomfort of talking about and discussing taboos. When Blaise told pre-service teachers about The

Sex Game, most of them reacted with shock and asserted that Yarrow's teaching practice did not seem 'good' for the children's development. However, like Yarrow, Blaise pointed out that these issues need to be discussed rather than covered up, and therefore risky teaching should be discussed more at university courses and at conferences.

Robinson (2005) exemplifies the difficulty of risk-taking teaching in early childhood education based on two projects that were conducted to encourage teachers to use anti-homophobic and anti-heterosexist practices in Australia. The first project researched the perceptions and views of 49 preschool educators about diversities and differences in early years education in Sydney. The second project was carried out with 139 early years educators in the state of New South Wales about gay, lesbian and gender equality issues. Based on these two research projects Robinson points out that there are some barriers to risky teaching; for instance, some educators revealed that sexuality was not an issue in early childhood education, and others pointed out that their religious beliefs contradicted risky teaching. Robinson (2005) thinks that the real risk is not carrying out risky teaching because by not doing this, it is hard to go beyond social injustice and inequality in early years settings.

As can be seen from the arguments above, teachers' roles are vital in the reproduction of gender inequality in preschool settings. However, there is a risk of putting too much emphasis on teachers' responsibility since they are part of the gendered world. Undoubtedly, their gendered understandings are socially constructed in relation to their historical, cultural and economic backgrounds. Also, most teacher training courses do not encourage teachers to think in critical ways with regard to gender issues. As consequence, teachers are duty bound to apply predetermined

guidelines (Coffey & Acker, 2005). On the other hand, there is also the risk of assuming that all teachers use the dominant practices. Teachers interpret curriculum in different ways and put their own ideas into their activities, which may not be according to the dominant practices.

1.3.1.3 Materials

Children's engagement with classroom materials is important for shaping children's perceptions of their gender roles. Toys can be counted as the materials that children most commonly engage with in classrooms. These materials carry cultural meanings that societies attach to them and they deserve attention since children use them to understand the world (Caldas-Coulthard & Leeuwen, 2002). Chick et al. (2002) observed the toys available to children in a private childcare centre in Pennsylvania and they found that only girls played in the toddler playroom and there were no blocks, cars or trucks there, only kitchen sets and baby dolls. Also, they claim that the colours of toys give messages to children based on the pink and blue division. Caldes-Coulthard and Leeuwen (2002) also claim that the colours of toys are important in giving gender messages and in their study they observed the colour division in toys like Barbie, Ken and Action Man. These kinds of toys take a primary place in children's culture. What they also found interesting about toys is that 'female dolls are represented as physically constrained in the ways they move, they are romanticised ... boys' toys and their related representations construct action, danger, risk and power' (ibid:106).

Homecorners and block corners are the two spaces in which gendered toys are located in preschool settings. It has been stated that these spaces are the most gendered areas; girls spend most of their time in the homecorner playing with

kitchen sets and dolls while boys are in the block area (MacNaughton, 2000). Taylor and Richardson (2005:166) point out that the 'role play context (in the home, in the car)' illustrates the ways in which hegemonic heterosexuality demands particularly coherent performances of the girl/mother and boy/father roles. There is not a lot of room for manoeuvre if girls and boys are to perform these gender roles correctly. Similarly, the block area does not leave much room for children to perform diverse roles; rather, boys just exercise masculinities (Danby & Baker, 1998). These gendered spaces highlight masculine and feminine play and toys in preschool settings, with even children performing challenging roles there (Taylor & Richardson, 2005).

Other materials with which children engage in preschool settings include picture books and stories. Gender representations in preschool picture books have been studied by researchers focusing mainly on how female and male characters are portrayed (Weitzman et al., 1972; Oskamp et al., 1996). The studies use sex-role socialisation theories concerned with the number of male and female main characters and traditional stereotypes. Commonly, active male and passive female portrayals are demonstrated by traditional stereotypes and occupational stereotypes in picture books. Despite female characters taking more of a role in picture books in recent years, most of the findings suggest that traditional representations of females and males still take place in stories (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). However, similar to the issue of numbers of female and male teachers in institutions, increasing the number of female characters in books should not be the only concern. Rather, there should be concern about how they are presented and what roles are given to the characters. The feminist poststructuralist framework offers to read illustrations as text since they contain a number of meanings. But more importantly, it is necessary to examine how

children as active meaning makers understand and interpret messages in picture books and stories (Jackson, 2007).

1.3.2 Children's construction of gender identities

In the literature, there are three ideas at the forefront of children's construction of gender identities in school settings: children construct their genders by (1) using gender dichotomy; (2) seeing boys and girls as opposites; and (3) challenging gender norms. In order to discuss these, I will not restrict the setting to preschools since inspiring studies have been conducted in elementary classrooms (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992; Thorne, 1993; Francis, 1998).

The early childhood education field has mostly been influenced by psychology (Kohlberg, 1966; Bem, 1983) and these studies have given little room to children's agency in their gender identity construction. However, recent studies have recognised the importance of the child's role by conducting qualitative research that involves children (Davies, 2003; MacNaughton, 2000; Yelland, 1998). Gender in these studies is socially constructed and is not based on one's biological sex. Also, it is not fixed and stable; there are different gender positions that an individual takes in daily life. This approach challenges the essential view of gender and most importantly it sees children's role in their gender identity construction.

According to Davies (2003:14), children are born into an already structured world and they learn what society expects from them as a male or female in order to have a recognisable identity within the existing social order. To do their 'gender right', children position themselves as either female or male. Davies found this binary in her study, *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales*, with preschool children in Australia. In the study, Davies read feminist tales to the children, but she found that the children

did not take up the stories as feminist tales but rather as traditional ones. For instance, when a female character was presented as dirty, some children were unhappy with this, wanting her to be clean and wearing nice clothes. It is important for children that the characters in tales are doing their gender right. Therefore, they mostly want characters to behave as their gender requires them to. Davies (2003) calls children's attempt to correct deviation 'category-maintenance' and this is an important tool that children use to demonstrate their social competence, to remind them of who they are and how their gender category should behave.

In a further study, Davies and Banks (1992) interviewed and observed four children from Frogs and Snails four years later, when they were eight, to see changes in their understandings of gender. They found that the children's ways of taking up stories were generally similar to when they were four. Again, not surprisingly, Davies and Banks (1992:22-23) found that the gender binary maintains a strong place in children's understandings of gender:

the children use the same (known, familiar) storylines to pull out the same threads over time and thus to constitute themselves as persons with continuity and that sense of continuity and stability in turn gives them a sense of control over their lives.

Supporting the above studies, children's view of gender as a dichotomous category is the most commonly presented finding in the literature. Children learn their gender category from a very early age. Browne (2004) found that all of the children aged 3 to 7 years in her study were clear about their gender categories and their consistency. According to Davies (2003), children construct their gender identities based on masculinity and femininity as two relational groups. There are diverse visual

signifiers like hair, dress and accessories that children associate with gender groups (Francis, 1998). Dress is the most distinct marker of the female/male binary. In Francis's (1998) study with primary school students in London, she found that the children saw clothing as almost part of one's gender. Similar to Caldes-Coulthard and Leeuwen (2002), who point out that most girls' toys are passive and boys' toys are active in terms of their moveable function, in Francis's study, this appeared in children's gendered dress. One of the girls stated that due to wearing a skirt as her school uniform she could not cycle and another girl said that women could not be builders because they wear dresses. The active/passive division can be seen from gendered clothes and school uniforms play a great part in this separation. Despite most preschools not having school uniforms, children still use clothing for gender marking. Blaise (2005) also observes that girly clothes prevent girls from participating in activities. For instance, one girl, Katy, who wore a dress, complained that she should not have worn the dress because she could not play on the monkey bars outside (ibid:62).

The gender dichotomy is also seen in children's play. Girls and boys mostly play in single-sex groups and use different spaces (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992) and gendered toys (Freeman, 2007). While girls' play is mostly about family life themes, boys carry out aggressive and superhero play (Davies, 2003; Änggård, 2011; Marsh, 2000). Girls' domination of domestic play and boys' use of superhero play are clearly known by children (Browne, 2004). Although they sometimes join each other's play, when they do so, the roles they take are passive; for instance, boys generally play dads, children or pets in the homecorner. It is safe to assume that it is more difficult for girls to be involved in boys' play since boys have more power to control classroom activities due to hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1987) created

the term 'hegemonic masculinity' term to explain how the dominant form of masculinity sees femininity as inferior and subordinate to other masculinities and femininities. Blaise (2005:21) applies this term to preschool settings. She states that 'in the kindergarten classroom, hegemonic masculinity can be thought of as the most desirable and powerful way to be a boy'.

Similar to hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity positions, Francis (1998) introduces two positions that children take: 'sensible selflessness' and 'silly selfish':

Of the feminine construction, maturity, obedience and neatness are the valued 'sensible' qualities, which naturally lead to 'selflessness' - giving and facilitating. The masculine construction involves 'silly' qualities of immaturity, messiness and naughtiness, leading to 'selfishness' - taking and demanding. (ibid:40)

Francis points out that children do not take these positions all the time, but they tend to use one of them. Their usage of dichotomous positions takes their construction of gender further by seeing girls and boys as opposite to each other. For instance, while girls are seen as naïve and sensible, boys are seen as rough in children's eyes. Even one of the girls in Francis's study, Lucinda, stated that 'girls are good and boys are bad' (Francis, 1998:41). It seems that on the whole, neither category likes the each other's engagements and activities. Thorne (1993) also observed that children defined boy and girl groups as rivals and this created ongoing competition between boys and girls. Consequently, this opposition draws gender boundaries. Thorne adapts the term 'borderwork' to explain children's interactions across gender boundaries (1993:64). Borders are not always emphasised by gender separation as

children sometimes come together to strengthen them. For instance, in Thorne's study (1993), girls and boys played games together but against each other by using gendered language like 'Bratty boys! Sissy boys' or 'Gossipy girls'.

While gender categories are not just different but also opposite, it is more difficult to cross gender boundaries, but children do sometimes cross them. They do take non-gendered positions. However, there are differences between the ways in which boys and girls cross these boundaries since their distance from the borders differs. It is safe to assume that boys on the side of hegemonic masculinity are in a more dangerous position compared to girls (Askew & Ross, 1988; Connell, 1996). Leaving a powerful position is less acceptable than gaining a powerful position. In other words being a 'tomboy' refers to something positive like an active girl, whereas a 'sissy girl' refers to a failed boy (Thorne, 1993). In this sense, it not just girls, but also boys who suffer from hegemonic masculinity. Janmohammed (2010) mentioned a 7-year-old boy who acted like a 'girl'. He liked to dress like a princess but his family and school were concerned about his behaviour because he was not doing gender right:

The boy may want to be a girl or may want to be like a girl or be a boy who prefers to engage with his feminine side. However, the little boy, like other little boys, is trapped. (Janmohammed, 2010:314)

Undoubtedly, it is common to see children policing each other to enforce the necessity of doing gender right. Danby and Baker (1998) conducted a study with 3–5 year old boys in the block area of a preschool in an inner-city area of Australia, which exemplifies how children teach each other to stay within boundaries. They found that older boys taught newcomers how to be masculine in the block area. This

process involved both exclusion – due to younger boys not adhering to the social order - and inclusion – due to the younger boys learning how they should behave.

As can be seen from Danby and Baker's study, children are under the control of other children. Regularity in preschool settings is mostly based on heterosexual norms (Surtees & Gunn, 2010). Blaise (2005) adopts Butler's heterosexual matrix concept to understand how heteronormativity takes place in preschool settings. The heterosexual matrix regulates gender and gender relations so that heterosexuality becomes the 'normal' right and the only way to be (Blaise, 2005:22). Blaise conducted research in a kindergarten in the United States to uncover the heterosexual matrix located in this setting. She found that children take up heterosexual discourses to position themselves and she labelled this situation 'playing it straight'. On the other hand, she also observed that being policed by their peers does not stop children from performing non-traditional roles. For instance, a girl called Madison had a complex gender identity where one second she could be with girls playing normative play and then a second later she could be playing with Lego. Madison's self did not exist within the discourses of emphasised femininity or hegemonic masculinity (ibid:135). According to Walkerdine (1990, cited in Francis, 1998:40), girls do not have active positions but rather are the 'feminine object[s] of a masculine gaze' or 'quasi teacher[s]'. However, as Madison's example demonstrates, some girls can take active positions (Davies, 2003; Marsh, 2000).

Boys mostly exert their power over others in female groups (Lowe, 1998) because girls are more tolerant to power than boys; however, Madison used her power for herself, not to subordinate others. A similar scene occurred in Davies's study: a boy called George wore a skirt and shouted 'I am the power'. Davies misread this power

as dominant male power; however, she later discovered that George experienced a kind of feminine power by wearing a skirt. More importantly, he did not do this to cross boundaries; rather he liked to do it as Madison had exercised her power for herself. In other words, in both examples the children positioned themselves outside of dominant positions so as not to disturb gender norms and just to be themselves. However, this does not mean that children who cross boundaries are outside of dominant positions; on the contrary, they are aware of them. For instance, Madison pretended to be a boy in dramatic play with the girls and she performed hegemonic masculinity over the girls.

Children are not just aware of the dominant positions available to them, they are also eager to talk about different gender discourses and sexualities. However, children's curiosity and enjoyment in talking about gender performances are mainly ignored and often considered 'dangerous' in preschool settings (Tobin, 1997). For instance, in Blaise's (2009) study, the children talked about the meanings of being a boyfriend, having sexy clothes and being pretty. While they talked about these issues, one of the children, Elena, questioned the dominant understanding of being beautiful and having a boyfriend. She stated that her aunt was beautiful, but she did not have a boyfriend. This idea challenged the dominant understanding of love relationship structures and Elena openly challenged these views. As demonstrated by Elena, by expanding the scope of the conversation, children are open to bringing up new ideas to discuss differences about love and sexual relationships.

1.3.3 National Identity

Compared to studies of gender in the early childhood education field, only a few studies focus on children's national identities in early years settings. Although early

years institutions play a role in creating national identities (Apple, 2001), not enough attention has been paid to exploring this role. Therefore, I will draw on some studies conducted in primary and secondary schools to understand the relation between school and children in the creation of their national identities. Similar to the section on gender, the place of nationalism in schools will be argued first. Rather than discussing this in relation to curriculum, teachers and materials separately, I shall deal with nationalism upon two kinds of practices that take place in schools: strict othering and othering. Then children's construction of national identities will be discussed.

1.3.3.1 Raising the Nation

Nation-states aim to create their imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) and education has always been a useful tool for constructing desired national identities (Apple, 2001; Gellner, 2006). Schools involve diverse practices to clarify 'who we are' and also 'who they are'. Similar to the male/female binary in gender, the us and them binary is used to define national identities in schools. While signifiers like clothes, hair and toys divide girls and boys, the us and them division is marked by flags, maps, history books, ceremonies, etc (Billig, 1995; Thompson, 2001).

Gordon and Holland (2003:27) point out that schooling is a national project that is planned purposefully, but there is also a dynamic - material, social and cultural - process inside schools involving children and teachers. To understand this dynamic relationship they use the 'nation space' concept to explore 'how nation and nationality are culturally constructed' in schools (ibid:33). According to Gordon and Holland (2003), nation spaces are constructed as physical, social and mental spaces in schools. While countries' geographical and historical features are shown by maps

that refer to physical spaces in the creation of the nation-states, the importance of social relations is shown, for instance, by the relationship between languages and geographical territories (ibid:33). As a mental construct they refer to songs and poems that are used in schools to awaken emotions. It can be said that all of these spaces in education are still mainly concerned with teaching ‘a vision of us’ (Tormey, 2006:315).

In the following part I will present two approaches in classroom practices to show how schools teach a vision of us and a vision of them. To explore these practices I will use the ‘othering’ concept based on the definition below which MacNaughton, Davis and Smith made to explore children’s racial identity formation process (2009:37):

Othering is understood as a process of seeing oneself positively by seeing an “other” as undesirable and lesser. It derives from hierarchical “us” and “them” thinking in which “them” is seen through negative stereotypes that may be based on race, geography, sexuality, gender, ethnic, economic, religious, or ideological differences. “They” are therefore “lesser” to us.

By adopting this definition I will call ‘strict othering’ the first approach, which focuses on practices that aim to homogenise the nation by making others invisible or enemies. Practices in the second approach also aim to homogenise the nation, but others are visible, yet not seen as ‘us’. This approach will be called ‘othering’.

The strict othering approach in schools is closely related to the assimilatory politics of nation-states. On the whole, other cultures, ethnicities or religious groups are not recognised or are recognised as a threat to the unity of the nation. Therefore, there

should only be one culture, one language and one set of values in schools. The study by Durrani and Dunne (2010) shows how strict othering takes place in the Pakistani context through an emphasis on 'oneness'. Their analysis of the national curriculum for primary schools reveals that Islam is the main signifier of Pakistani identity and given the use of the metaphor of 'oneness', the nation is constructed in such a way as to ignore all religious, ethnic, linguistic, regional and gender differences (ibid:222). Durrani and Dunne found that the Pakistani identity was constructed through excluding external and internal others. Indian Hindus, as external others, were represented as opposites in textbooks. However, it was not only the textbooks that created this image; Durrani and Dunne point out that teachers also use this textbook information in their classrooms. As one of the teachers stated, when she told students about the differences between Muslim and Hindu women, students developed hatred towards Hindus (ibid:224). Internal others were mostly non-Muslim communities since being Pakistani was seen as equal to being Muslim in the curriculum and textbooks. For instance, there was a lesson called 'The Islamic Republic of Pakistan' and concepts like *jihad* – the war against non-believers - were taught to students to emphasise the Muslim national identity.

Durrani and Dunne (2010) point out that internal and external othering in schools is closely related to ongoing or past conflicts between the dominant power and groups of others. These particular groups are represented in negative ways to students through diverse practices in schools. Zembylas's (2013) study of school memorial ceremonies presents an example of how past conflicts influence school practices. Undoubtedly, school ceremonies are important for carrying national messages via poems, speeches, drama, dances, etc. that are performed by students and teachers at these special times. In his study, Zembylas compared two different Greek-Cypriot

schools' approaches to ceremonies commemorating persons who went missing during the invasion of Turkey in 1974. One school held a ceremony based on 'heroism and victimhood', in which the Turks were presented as barbarians, and the Greek-Cypriots were presented as the victims of the invasion. In the other school, the theme was based on 'peace and common pain' and both sides were presented as having suffered due to the invasion. In the first school, external othering was strict, but in the second school, there was an effort to understand others rather than exclude them. According to Zembylas (2013:479), 'school ceremonies are used by the nation-state to establish its power, while simultaneously there are also efforts to resist hegemonic narratives and advance alternative ones', as can be seen from these two examples in his study.

Similar to Zembylas, Lomsky-Feder (2011) also focused on memorial ceremonies in the Israeli context. Lomsky-Feder (2011) observed that there was a shift from heroic nationalism to traumatic nationalism. While heroic nationalism refers here to the military ethos of showing unconditional commitment to the state, traumatic nationalism in Lomsky-Feder's (2011:582) terms refers to 'captur[ing] the national sentiment around the pain, the price and the trauma associated with war'. As a post-national discourse, traumatic nationalism aims to create national citizens that are under the control of hegemonic groups. According to Lomsky-Feder (2011), the relation between globalisation and nationalism also influences the way in which nationalism takes place in schools. Schools now try to negotiate globalisation and neoliberal politics to create both national and global citizens. Raising global citizens rather than national ones is taking place more, especially in European countries (Lomsky-Feder, 2011).

Dahlberg and Moss also state that nation-states are losing their power because of the demands of the global world and neoliberal policies. Preschools are both ensuring today's labour force through 'childcare for working parents' and preparing tomorrow's labour force through investment in 'social and human capital' (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005:49). The two authors further state that international organisations force nation-states to follow the Anglo-American dominant discourse, which lessens the power of nationalist discourses in the global world. However, it is hard to claim that nationality has lost its power. As Lomsky-Feder points out, 'a global orientation is not necessarily accompanied by a weakening of national identity, but rather by a change to its complexion that accords with the post-national discourse' (Lomsky-Feder, 2011:583).

It can be said that in specific contexts, such as Israel or Palestine, the negotiation of the global world may not weaken national identities. That is why I call the first approach "strict othering" because despite changes and negotiations, others are still seen in a negative way or are not seen at all. The reason why I call the second approach "othering" is that in some contexts, like European countries, others are not represented in negative ways and they can be visible in national education. Global citizens may be seen as more important than national citizens. However, there is a common acceptance in the literature that the current changes in education - like multicultural education - still work for society's dominant groups (Lomsky-Feder, 2011).

There is a contradiction in the othering approach because it neither accepts nor excludes others implicitly. Lappalainen (2006) found this contradiction of national and multicultural ideologies in Finland's preschool curriculum. Lappalainen points

out that although the immigrant population is rising in Finnish society, it is still smaller than in many other European countries. Consequently multicultural education is taking a greater place than before in Finland's education system. Lappalainen claims that a liberal version of multicultural education has been adapted, in which minority ethnic groups are seen as an object of tolerance (2006:64). This approach is highly problematic because tolerance as 'a national practice of inclusion' (Hage, 2000 cited in Lappalainen) positions dominant groups as power holders who tolerate others. Lappalainen observed this situation in the Finnish national preschool curriculum, which, on the one hand, emphasises the place of minority cultures and immigrant children in education, but on the other hand places more emphasis on Finnish national values. Hence liberal multiculturalism highlights the boundaries rather than crossing them.

In this sense, it is fair to say that multicultural education opens up possibilities to see others; however, others are mostly governed based on the culture of dominant groups. Lappalainen's other study demonstrates how others are unified and represented as a minority without the differences and diversities being realised (Lappalainen, 2003). She observed International week in a Finnish preschool setting, when items such as foods, flags and souvenirs of foreign cultures were displayed and discussed. Also, some immigrant parents were invited to share their culture with the children. During this week, differences were celebrated. However, other cultures were represented in a narrow sense. For instance, in Lappalainen's study, children discussed illustrations that showed the culture of Somalia as a poor country and women wearing headscarves were identified. As can be seen from this example, representation of women from Somalia was reduced to one image. In this sense, others, especially non-Europeans, become a resource for one or two weeks a year to

celebrate occasions like International Week and they can be seen as a problem during the remaining 50 weeks of the year (Lappalainen, 2003:91).

1.3.4 Children's construction of national identities

While educational policies and practices focus on creating national citizens, children engage with these practices in their everyday lives. The interactive relation between children and their diverse environments influence how children define their sense of belonging. Stephens (1997:11) points out the necessity of understanding how children themselves have experienced and understood imagined national communities which more work need to be done in this area as the relation between childhood and nation has still not been extensively studied (Millie, 2007).

This study engages with the school context and particularly with early years. Despite the fact that there are studies that show that very young children are aware of national discourses around them (Bar-Tal, 1996; Dockett & Cusack, 2003), there are only a few studies involving young children's national identity construction in early years settings (Lappalainen, 2006). It has been emphasised that, at an early age, children do not have enough knowledge, for instance, about the differences between continents, countries and the cities in which they live (Barrett & Short, 1992) because children develop their understandings of national identities from tangible constructs to abstract ones (Carrington & Short, 1995). In this sense, national identity refers to a fixed construction that develops as children grow older. However, this study challenges this approach by seeing identities as discursive constructs.

Carrington and Short (1995) conducted an ethnographic study in an English primary school to understand 8–11-year- old children's conceptions of national identity. They asked the children a set of questions including, 'Are you British or something else?'

and ‘What makes a person British?’, and categorised the answers based on the age and ethnicity of the children. They found that age is an important indicator of when children’s answers move from tangible to abstract ideas. Their place of birth and language were used by the children as a key determinant of their national identities. In their comparison of ethnic majority and ethnic minority groups, while some children who came from ethnic minorities defined themselves as having dual identities, most of the children defined themselves as British first, revealing the strong place of monolithic culture.

Contrary to Carrington and Short, for Howard and Gill (2001), national identity is not a fixed construction but rather a discursive one. As with gender identity, national identity is socially constructed by the complex relation of agency and social structure. Children’s historical and cultural backgrounds influence their way of defining, or not defining, their or others’ nationalities. While diverse sources shape this process, undoubtedly, children’s personal experiences influence their understanding of other nationalities. For instance, it has been argued that children who travel have more knowledge about others than children who do not (Howard & Gill, 2001). In addition, children’s ideas about national identity in more culturally diverse societies that are either immigrant based or have long histories of immigration are unlikely to be the same as the ideas of children who live in countries whose experience of diversity is more limited (Waldron & Pike, 2006:247).

By approaching nationalism as a discursive construction Howard and Gill (2001) conducted a study in Australia, in which ‘the point is not so much *if* they (children) identify as being Australian (or not as the case may be), but rather how they feel about doing so, what images they use, their language, their expressions, their

inconsistencies and so on' (Howard & Gill, 2001:92). This study was not concerned with whether children know about their nations or other nationalities but rather with their engagement with national discourses. Howard and Gill (2001) found that the children talked about symbols, stereotypes and icons when they were asked what it meant to be Australian. As a way of handling these issues, the children used rules and definitions such as, 'your birthplace defines your nationality' or 'if you are a resident, you can be a citizen'. Another strategy that the children used was making comparisons between Australia and other countries.

Lappalainen (2006) states that Butler's (1999) performativity concept can be useful when educational contexts are researched in relation to nationalism. In regard to Butler's term, 'gender performativity' means that gender is produced through discursively constrained performative acts and through the repetition of these acts (Butler, 1999 cited in Lappalainen, 2006:67). Similarly, nationality is constructed and reconstructed at particular times and in particular spaces. In Lappalainen's study in two preschool classrooms in Finland, nationality was performed through food, skin colour and national dress. Similar to children's efforts to do their gender right, performing national identities took place correctly in children's national understanding. Not surprisingly, children who belonged to a dominant culture correctly perform their identities, whereas children who had dual identities were seen as others or, as stated earlier, as in-between groups.

In this sense, children are aware of the importance of doing their nationality right. Hence how others are represented in schools finds a place in children's understanding. It is safe to say that there is a close relation between the ways in which schools approach nationalism and children's national identification. Despite

the fact that children do not merely follow what schools try to impose on them, it can be hard for children to challenge dominant discourses. As discussed earlier, Durrani and Dunne (2010) found that the Pakistani identity excluded internal and external others in the curriculum. They observed that children's national identity construction was, most of the time, in the same line as Pakistani identity in the curriculum. When they asked students to draw things related to the Pakistani identity and non-Pakistani identities, most of them drew images of Islamic symbols and talked about them as representative of the Pakistani identity. Also, as others, Hindus and Americans were drawn as enemy groups. Moreover most of the students' representations were gendered and involved militarist images like guns, tanks and rockets. Women were absent or were represented as serving men in both curriculum and children's understandings of national identities.

1.4 Conclusion

Above, I have concentrated on literature on children's gender and national identities in early years settings. Identity was conceptualised as a dynamic process created by a complex relation between individual and social structures. However, the literature revealed that the dominant approaches in early years institutions mostly see children as *tabula rasas* which can be shaped by top-down practices. In that sense, it was shown that children's differences and diversities are ignored because top-down practices aim to transform the other into the same. On the other hand, it was demonstrated that many scholars in the field have been challenging these top-down approaches by emphasising children's role in their identity construction. More studies in the literature have discussed complex identities that go beyond binary

understandings of modernist theories and attach importance to children's agency in early years settings.

In the section on gender, I discussed how early years policies, educators and classroom materials play a part in children's gender understandings. It has been shown that children engage with gendered practices in which gender inequalities, gender stereotypes and heterosexual norms are (re)produced by the influence of, in particular, teachers, toys and books. Hence studies that use poststructuralist, feminist and queer theories in the field offer different ways of seeing gender that open up possibilities for children to exercise their fluid identities. These studies also reveal that children use mostly the dominant gendered understandings to do their gender right. In addition, it has been discussed that some children take risks and perform non-gendered roles by crossing boundaries.

In the national identity section I focused on how, as national projects, schools present 'us and them'. I have argued that others are absent or seen as a threat to national unity in some school contexts. In multicultural societies, others are not invisible but they are not seen as 'us'. This understanding invites practices such as an emphasis being placed on others' differences from the dominant culture and the marginalisation and unification of diversities into a single voice. On the other hand, it has been argued that young children's engagement with these practices has not received enough attention in the literature. The studies that approach national identities as a fixed construction are mostly concerned with children's knowledge about nationalities based on their ages. There are also studies that approach national identity as a discursive construction. With regard to this understanding, how children

engage with the diverse national discourses around them is the main concern of these studies.

In the light of the literature reviewed, this study adopts a perspective that combines structure and agency in individuals' identity construction. While structure here refers to patterned rules and resources that shape individuals in society, agency refers to individuals' abilities to make choices to change, resist and control discourses. In this sense, individuals' identities are constructed through the discourses available to them (Davies, 2003). There are dominant discourses around individuals that shape particular possibilities and limitations in their lives. Foucault's concept of regimes of truth is useful to understand that 'institutionally produced and sanctioned truths govern and regulate us' (MacNaughton, 2005:29). It is necessary to explain contextual conditions that determine regimes of truths and what these truths are in specific contexts. Thus Chapter 2 outlines the Turkish context in terms of the historical, economic and cultural background of the country in relation to the educational sphere. This is followed by Chapter 3 which discusses how the following research questions were addressed by focusing on the methodology and methods studied.

1. How do gender and national identities manifest themselves in early years' policies and practices?
2. How do children use the early years curriculum and practices in the creation of their understanding of gender and national identities?

Chapter 2

Gender, Nationalism and Early Childhood Education in Turkey

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the background information regarding the structure of early childhood education in Turkey with particular focus on the question of how gender and nationalism are addressed in the broader Turkish education system. Without looking at how gender and national discourses shape and are shaped by the Turkish education system, it would be difficult to understand their appearances in early childhood education, which is the aim of this study.

Through discussing these two categories' centrality in the Turkish education system, the chapter also answers the question of why this study does not focus on other important dimensions of identity. For example, religion might come to mind as a dominant discourse in the Turkish society. However, we will see that this is not the main dimension in shaping classrooms in Turkey due to the country's 'secular'¹ education system.

The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, the current structure of early education in Turkey will be presented by highlighting the types of early childhood institutions, the content of the curriculum, the schooling rate and the

¹There are some on-going debates regarding whether or not we can still call the Turkish education system secular because of the recent changes in curriculum and the types of schools, which include more religious elements – as you will see in the main body of this chapter. However, I still use the term 'secular' with regard to the education system because secularism is still one of the core features of Turkish education (MoNE, 2015a).

training and recruitment of early childhood education teachers. Then, in the second section I will highlight the ways in which gender and nationalism appeared in Turkish education. This section will also underline two important features of the Turkish education system, which are also the core of early childhood education: centralisation and westernisation. In doing so, the chapter also offers an insight into the socio-political transformation of the country.

2.2 The Structure of Early Childhood Education in Turkey

Under the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) there are private and state preschool classes (4-5 age groups) and kindergartens (0-5 age groups) in Turkey. In addition to these schools, there are institutions that work under the General Directorate of Children Services, which accept only children who are orphans or have divorced or prisoner parents (SPF, 2009). Moreover, based on Law no. 657 article 191, private companies, which employ more than 150 women workers, provide services for early childhood education. This study focuses in particular on public preschools. In this section, I will give some information about the current structure of these institutions in terms of the teacher training and employment process and the content of the preschool curriculum.

Preschool teachers are trained in a similar curriculum in both public and private universities for four years. In this education process there are modules that aim to teach the candidates the application of music, play, science, drama, preparation for primary school (reading-writing exercises) and mathematic activities in the classrooms. In their last years the candidates practise these activities in early years institutions. The students are also taught about subjects like Development and

Table 2.1 National Education Statistics Formal Education 2014'15 (MoNE, 2015)

Early Childhood Institutions		Number of institutions	Number of students	Number of teachers	Number of classroom
Institutions of MoNE	Kindergarten	4167	369 170	21 559	15 071
	Public	2259	280 256	15 038	9638
	Private	1908	88917	6521	5433
	Preschool	21 037	729 426	38 340	31 881
	Public	20 220	696 040	33 781	28 864
	Private	817	33 386	2726	2588
Institutions opened in accordance with Law no. 657 article 191		121	8717	667	568
General Directorate of Children Services		1647	49 345	7472	5268
Total		26972	1 156 661	68038	52 788

Psychology, Mental Health and Physical Anatomy with a focus on early years development. In addition, modules like Classroom Management, Learning Psychology, Material Development and Educational Psychology are part of the curriculum of the teacher training course. In addition, there are modules that focus on the Turkish context like the Principles and reforms of Atatürk, the Turkish language, and the History of Turkey, which are compulsory in most faculties. Moreover the

candidates can select optional modules such as children's rights and participation, sociology, and computer education in schools.

After graduating from the four year teacher training course, all teachers who want to be employed in state schools, including preschool teachers, need to pass the central examination of MoNE (Public Personnel Selection Examination – KPSS). The exam consists of three main parts. In the first part, the candidates are asked to answer questions about Turkish and Mathematic; the second part includes questions about History, Geography and Citizenship Knowledge. Finally, the last part includes the subjects of teacher training curriculum such as Developmental Psychology, Psychology of Learning, Class Management, Assessment and Measurement Technics, and Consultant and Special Education (ÖSYM, 2016). There is an additional examination process for some teachers who specialise in physics, mathematic, history and geography. However, preschool teachers along with primary school teachers do not need to take the additional part of the examination process. MoNE does not state any specific reason for this difference. This might be considered as a reflection of the understanding of MoNE, which perceives early years children's education, including primary school education, as not being a specialised area.

MoNE announces available positions for graduates in particular schools across Turkey. The schools are graded based on their conditions in terms of the social and economic background of the catchment area and the transportation. Teachers select schools depending on their KPSS scores and those with low scores are more likely to be employed in low graded schools. Being a teacher in a state school means a secure

future in Turkey because MoNE employs teachers with permanent contracts until their retirement age. Losing one's job as a state school teacher is uncommon.

While teachers are employed by MoNE, teacher assistants are employed via subcontracting private companies. Employing an assistant is not compulsory; rather it depends on teachers' needs and the schools' budgets. The role of these assistants is not clearly defined in MoNE's regulation; rather, the companies determine their roles. They mostly help teachers with their activities, and are responsible for children's daily necessities like preparing lunch, helping them to dress and undress and cleaning in the classroom. The salary of an assistant is paid from the budget of the primary school and the parents' monthly payment to the school. Although state schools are free to attend, a small amount of money is required from parents every month for preschool classes, which is determined based on the school's budget.

Preschool teachers are expected to apply the preschool education curriculum, which is prepared by MoNE (2013), in both state and private institutions. The programme is defined as developmental, but teachers are reminded that every child will follow a different development path and has his or her own personal character. Also, it is stated that this programme is a synthesis of global and national approaches as it adapts different learning theories and approaches from other countries. However, which educational approaches have been adapted is not explained. The early years programme mostly focuses on developmental aims to 'ensure children develop in a healthy way by reaching their full cognitive potential, social-emotional, motor and language development' (MoNE, 2013:14). In the light of this, the programme introduces children's social and emotional, cognitive, motor, language and self-care skills based on three age ranges: 36-48 month, 48-60 months, and 60-72 months. For

instance, as a cognitive skill, 60-72 month old children are expected to know the names of the days of the week and target 18, which is ‘a child can explain time concepts’, can be used to teach children this skill (MoNE, 2013:20). All activities in which children engage are planned by teachers annually, monthly and daily according to this programme. Turkish language, art, drama, music, mathematic, science, preparation for reading and writing, play, and trips are introduced as classroom activities.

Also the programme presents an ideal early childhood education classroom as in Figure 2.1.1 below (MoNE, 2013:38). The numbers on the picture present (1) a block area, (2) a dramatic play centre,² (3) an art centre, (4) a book centre, (5) a science centre, (6) sand and water tables, (7) a music centre, and (8) an entrance and waiting area. However, it is safe to claim that most preschool classrooms are far from this ideal example. From my personal experience, most preschools do not have these qualities and the classrooms are generally 20 square metres in size. Also children are not allowed to play freely with books, music instruments or materials for science experiments since they can be expensive. The structured plan of the day instructs children in their engagement in the classroom. More correctly, the teacher as the instructor determines the activities, but according to the programme, it is child-centred education and teachers should give opportunities to children to choose the materials and activities with which they want to engage (MoNE, 2013:14).

²Homecorner is converted to dramatic play centre in the 2013 programme but homecorner is still widely used in preschools.

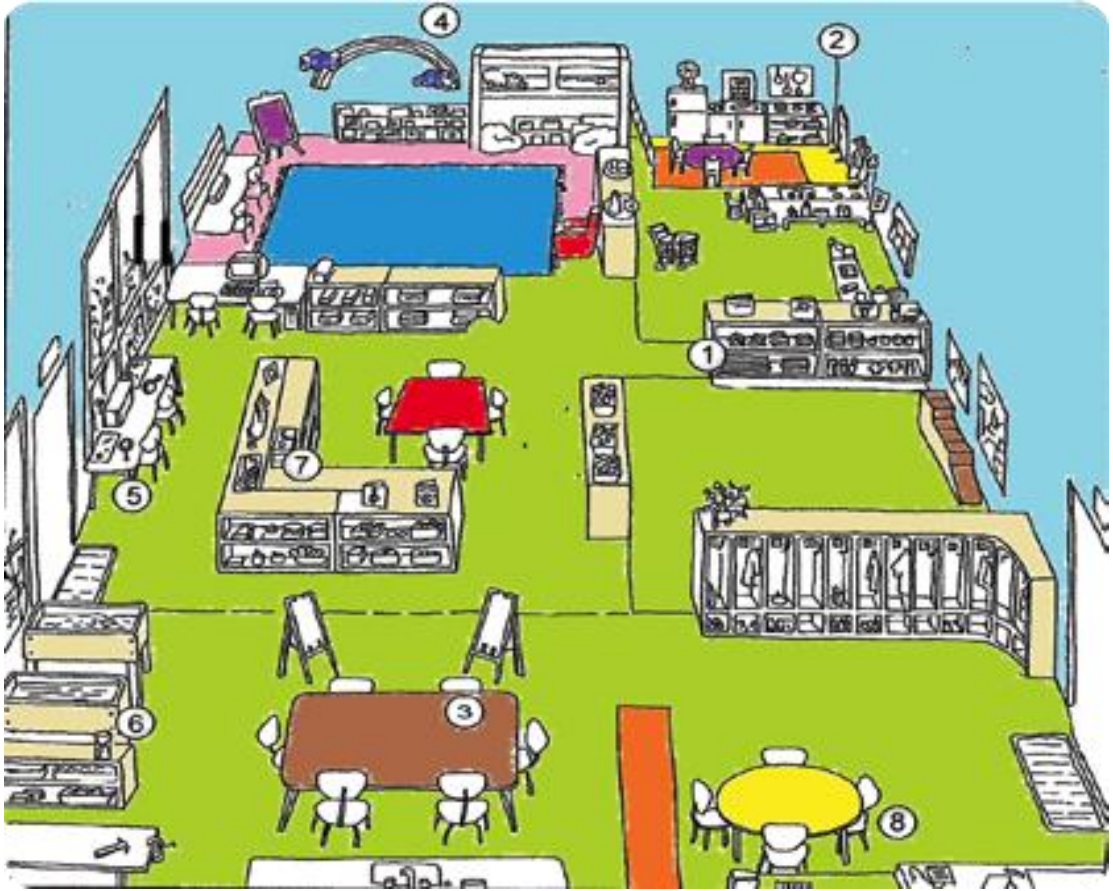


Figure 2.1.1: Ideal preschool classroom

When we look at the daily routine of preschool classrooms, it can be seen that the majority of state preschools run half-day programmes. The morning class runs between 8am and 1pm, and the afternoon class runs between 12pm and 5pm. According to the MoNE (2014), these preschool classes can accept between ten and 20 children but it is also stated that more children can be accepted if necessary. This necessity refers the number of available schools in the area. For instance, the research schools for this study had 24 and 25 students in their preschool classrooms because there are not enough schools around to limit the number of classrooms to 20 as can be seen from Table 2.1. Although these are just two cases, they can give us a broad idea about the insufficient number of preschool classrooms in the big cities, as the cases are located in the capital of Turkey. On the other hand the number of early

education institutions is gradually increasing in line with the increase in the schooling rate, as Figure 2.1.2 below demonstrates.

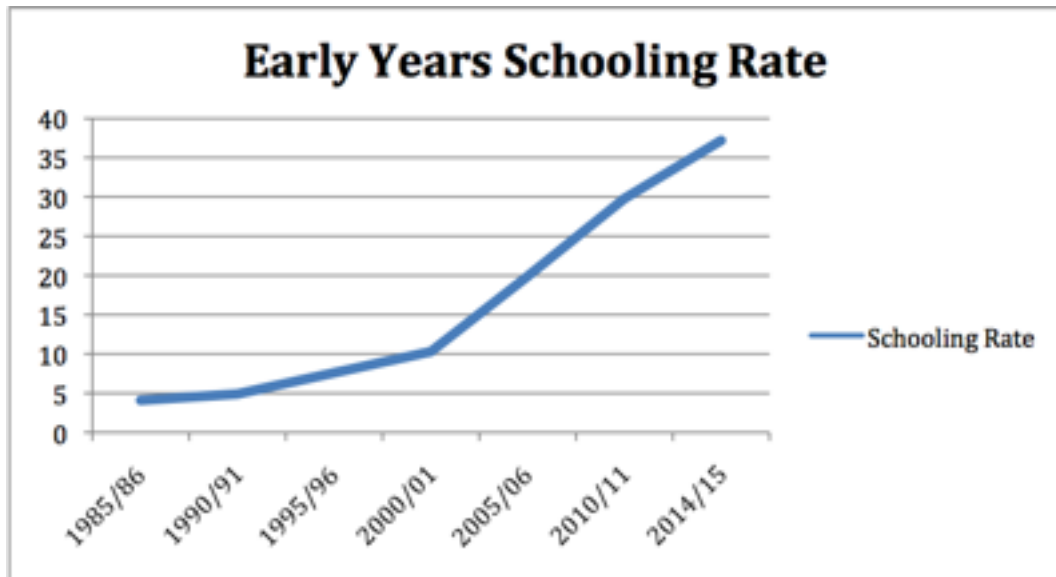


Figure 2.1.2: The increase in the early years schooling rate in the last 30 years (Derman & Başal, 2010; TÜİK, 2015). While x axis refers years, y axis presents the percentage of early years' schooling rate.

2.3 Nationalism and Gender in the Turkish Education System

This section explores the construction of national and gender identities in the Turkish education system through focusing on its centralised and westernised features respectively. The focal theme of the section is the deployment of the Kemalist ideology in shaping the Turkish education in general, so the argument will not be built on the early childhood education institutions in Turkey. However, it should be noted that early childhood institutions cannot be considered separately from this broader picture. Before I focus on the education system, this section aims to give the reader a brief history of the modernization of Turkey, to explain some crucial discourses which have been shaping Turkish identity throughout recent history.

The modernization process of Turkey stems from the late Ottoman period in the nineteenth century. Westernizing the Empire was the aim of reformers so as to guarantee the continuation of the Ottoman Empire through the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918) (Kasaba, 1997). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, born in Thessaloniki and educated in military institutions, was the leader who put the idea of building a Westernized nation into action. Atatürk fought in both the Balkan War and in the first World War and during this process, he developed his ideas centred on converting the Empire into a modern nation. All these ideas were articulated through the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923 in Ankara. The nation-building process mainly rested upon replacing the traditional and religious society of Turkey with a Western and modern society. Secularism was the foundation of this process. By abolishing the caliphate, the multicultural and multi-religious system of the Ottoman Empire was converted into a nation which unified ethnicity and culture into a single identity.

In order to convert to a secular society, a series of reforms were made by the National Assembly. The aim was to radically change Turkish society in order to bring it into line with European countries. This meant moving away from the daily practices and institutions of the Ottoman Empire, which followed from the influence of Islamic culture. Changing clothing styles, closing religious schools, adopting Western laws and transferring to the Latin alphabet were important reforms for the modernisation of Turkey. The military-national character of modern Turkey was one of the most important discourses in the creation of the nation (Altınay, 2004). Militarist and authoritative narratives and practices were used to unify the nation. To emphasise the sacredness of the nation, a green flag depicting a moon and an eight-pointed star was replaced with a red flag showing a moon and a five-pointed star in

1922. In 1936, it was accepted as the national flag of the country. Children are taught in school that the red of the current flag represents the sacrifices made during the formation of Turkey, how the star and moon were reflected in a lake of blood shed by the Turkish soldiers. The narrative of the ‘blood of martyrs’ is still used symbolically in the school context to remind children how difficult it was to build this nation (Kanci, 2004).

According to Kasaba (1997, p.17), Atatürk had envisioned Turkey as the result of an organised, well-articulated, linear process of modernization through which the whole nation was to move simultaneously and with uniform experience. However, the process of modernisation generated ambiguities, for example, the tensions between Muslim and secularist, Turk and Kurd, reason and faith, rural and urban. It is safe to say that tensions between these ambiguities still exist in Turkish society. In the next section I shall discuss how this transformation reveals itself in education.

2.3.1 Centralised ‘Kemalist’ Education and Nationalism

‘Teachers: the new generation will be your devotion’

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 1924³

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in 1923 after the Turkish War of Independence, established the Turkish Republic, and his statement above demonstrates how the new republic saw teachers as responsible for building a new nation. Unsurprisingly, Mustafa Kemal called these new teachers the ‘education military’ (Kaplan, 1999). The parallels between the military and education in the Kemalist ideology also are evident in the two titles that Atatürk used: ‘military commander in chief’ and

³For the source see Kiziltepe (2015).

‘teacher in chief’ (Altınay, 2004). In the following, you will see how these teachers, who are educated and recruited by a centralised system as shown in the previous section, apply a centralised and nationalised curriculum and textbooks in the classroom. This section examines how the Kemalist ideology applies the centralisation of curriculum and textbooks and school settings as tools to form the national identities of children. The first sub-section focuses on nationalist discourses in the textbooks and curriculum, and the second part concentrates on school settings.

2.3.1.1 Curriculum and Textbooks

The Kemalist ideology was the hegemonic ideology of the Turkish Republic until the 2000s⁴ and it refers to governing the country with the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. These principles are secularism, statism, populism, republicanism, reformism and nationalism. According to MoNE (2013), these are the kernels of the Turkish education system. Indeed, Turkish education aims to create one type of citizen, who is bound by Atatürk’s principles and reforms. The centralisation of curriculum and textbooks is seen as an important tool to achieve this end. Although there are different types of schools, as seen in Table 3.1, schools continue to use the textbooks, written by MoNE, to apply the centralised curriculum.

Turkish scholars demonstrate how these textbooks and curriculum serve the aim of creating children’s national identities (Altınay, 2004; Kabapınar, 2005; Kaplan, 2005; Kancı, 2009). Most of these studies focus on the compulsory course of

⁴There are discussions about Kemalism, as the hegemonic ideology of the country, has gradually lost its power over the last decade in relation to the gaining power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as a ‘moderate Islamic government’ between 2002 and the present (Tuğal, 2009; White, 2012).

‘citizenship education’⁵, which were taught by military officers in their uniforms. At the secondary school level, the most apparent example emphasises the ‘nationalist discourse’ in the education system (Çayır&Gürkaynak, 2008; Ince, 2012). Altınay’s (2004) research demonstrates how high school students’ national identities are formed by the content of the course. Drawing on interviews with students and people who have taught this course and observations of classroom practices, she found that students’ engagement with the course content differed based on their ethnic background and whether the schools were located in the south-east and west of Turkey. For instance, most students in Istanbul agreed that ‘Turkey was surrounded by enemies and that our military had to remain strong’ (ibid:145). However, in Diyarbakır, which is the biggest city in the south-eastern part of Turkey, most of the Kurdish students were not willing to internalise the course content as much as their counterparts in Istanbul. However, they stated that they felt uncomfortable with raising their voices against the hegemonic nationalist discourse. One Kurdish woman interviewee, who was a university student when Altınay interviewed her, revealed how the national education system excludes others by imposing the Turkish self (ibid:154):

When I say ‘I am Turk’ I feel more secure. I feel like I can avoid certain dangers by doing that. The aim behind this is to distance you from your own people. Why is this course not important in Kayseri yet very important in the Southeast? There is a reason...The course is not about teaching military service. I think there are other issues behind it.

⁵The name of the course has been changing over the years. For example, it has been called ‘Citizenship Education’, ‘National Security Knowledge’, and ‘Citizenship and Human Rights’. Here, I use ‘Citizenship Education’ as it is the clearest title to refer to the content of the course.

The above statement of the Kurdish teenager about feeling more secure by saying that she is Turkish reflects the aim of the Kemalist ideology in creating a homogenous Turkish identity via the centralised and ‘authoritative’ education system. Although one might argue that the definition of the Turkish nation in the 1982 constitution - ‘The Turkish people founding the Republic of Turkey are called the Turkish nation’ - is inclusive of all citizens, on the other hand it can also be argued that this definition undermines the differences between citizens in favour of being a Turk.

This is also evident in studies that have found that national heroes, military victories and praising Turkishness have occupied a great place in textbooks to create the Turkish identity. According to Ince (2012), *the Civic Information for the Citizen* textbook is an important text for the post-1929 period because it gives the understanding of Atatürk and the republican elites on citizenship due to the fact that it was dictated by Atatürk to his adopted daughter Afet Inan. Ince (2012) claims that this textbook heavily emphasises the slogan of ‘one language, one culture, and one ideal’ as the below statements reveal:

‘There is no state in the world which is bigger, older, or cleaner than the Turkish nation’ (ibid:119-120)

‘The Turkish language is the most beautiful, richest, and easiest language in the world’ (ibid:120)

Having roots in the above statements, most of the textbooks on citizenship education have emphasised similar discourses. Altınay (2004:125) summarises the aims of the textbooks for the National Security Knowledge course from 1926 to 2003:

Turks have been a military-nation through-out history; Turkish history is written with victories; military service is not only a sacred duty, but a necessary rite of passage for young men; military is a school and students are soldiers; self-sacrifice is necessary for the nation (and the state) to survive and all Turks sacrifice willingly and without hesitation; and so on.

On the other hand, in recent years there have been some changes in the curriculum and textbooks, which are linked to the requirements for joining the European Union. In 2004-2005, the new curriculum for primary education was introduced with a promise to change the previous system's teacher centred education, examination based approach and discriminatory nationalist discourses. According to Kancı (2009), the recent textbooks and curriculum have aimed to lessen the nationalist and militarist discourses through giving more space to other nationalities and cultures. She gives an example of the new fourth-grade (primary school) social sciences courses, which include chapters such as 'I am Learning About My Past', 'The Place We Live In', and 'My Far Away Friends' instead of the chapters entitled 'Getting to Know My Neighbourhood, My City and My Region', and 'History, Our First Homeland and Anatolia in History' (ibid:369). Similarly, in the fifth grade (primary school), the chapters of the social science textbooks have been modified with less nationalist ascriptions. For instance, the chapters 'How Did We Succeed in Forming the Republic?' and 'Our Beautiful Homeland Turkey' have been replaced by 'Getting to Know the Region We Live In', 'The Dreams That Came True' and 'One Country One Flag' in the new textbooks (ibid:369). As Kancı (2009) emphasises, the use of words such as 'nation' and 'homeland' has decreased in the new textbooks and these have been replaced by 'country' and 'society'. Similarly, representations of

warrior ancestors as role models have been replaced by world-famous national sportspeople, artists, scientists and politicians.

These transformations have opened up new debates between Kemalists and supporters of the current Turkish government, the AKP, which has been in power since 2002. Although the transformation in the education system began as part of the integration process of the European Union (EU), Kemalists claim that those changes aim to shake the republican values of Turkey, including the importance of Atatürk. Contrary to the Kemalists' fears in this period, the AKP government has maintained secular practices like banning the usage of religious symbols and clothes in schools. Moreover, according to Turkish scholars, (Kancı, 2009; Çayır&Gürkaynak, 2008; Ince, 2012) the new curriculum has continued to keep the nationalist discourse in its content although it has changed the methods of representation. Kancı (2009) also points out that the nationalist content has moved to the later years of the school curriculum such as the sixth and seventh grades.

In 2013, a more fundamental change occurred in the Turkish education system. Until that time, the length of compulsory education was 8 years, which did not include early years education. It included only primary (5 years) and secondary schooling (3 years), known as *İlkogretim*, which does not have an equivalent word in English. After students graduated from *İlkogretim*, they continued to high school, which was not part of their compulsory education. The AKP government proposed the 4+4+4 education model instead of *İlkogretim* as the compulsory education model. The first four years refer to primary education. The second part refers to lower secondary education and the last four years refer to secondary education (see Figure 2.2).

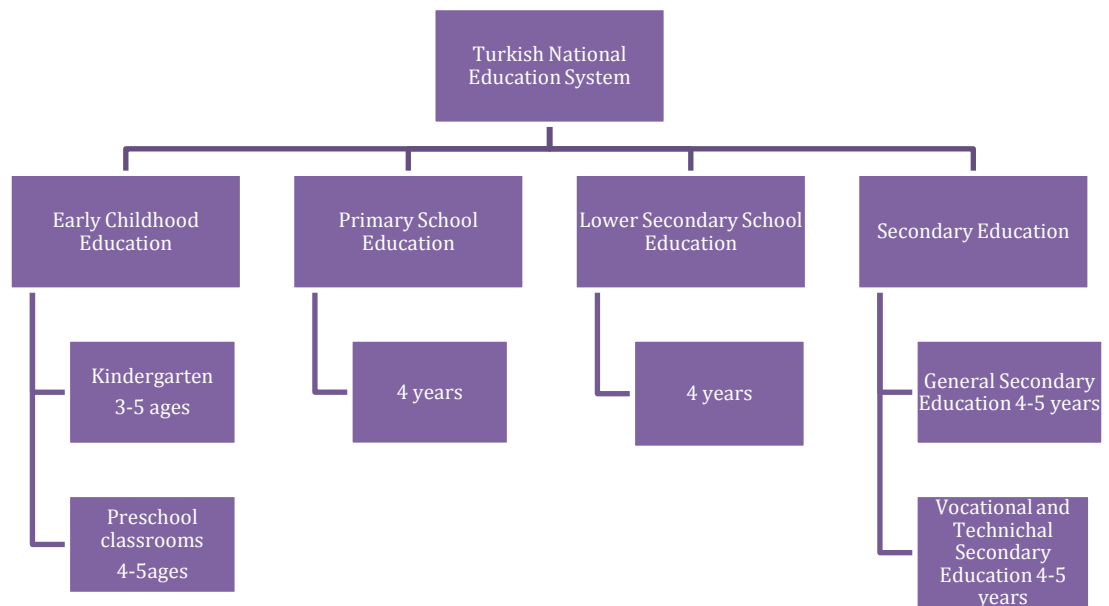


Figure 2.2: The structure of Turkish National Education System⁶

According to supporters of the previous model – mostly Kemalists –, the government has applied this change to make it possible for students who graduate from primary school to continue to religious schools – *Imam Hatip* – and to increase the dominance of religion in the Turkish education system. The government has not denied the children can start religious schools in their early ages according to the new system, but they state that the main intention is to make the education system more democratic through offering alternative types of schools (MoNE, 2012). Moreover, they have not hesitated in proposing courses such as religious culture and moral education as a compulsory part of the primary 1,2,3 grade curriculum. Optional new courses (The life of Prophet Muhammed, and Qur'an-i Kerim, which covers the content of the Qur'an and Basic Religious Education) are also included in

⁶This figure shows national education system which does not include higher education. According to latest 4+4+4 system, primary school, lower secondary school and secondary school education are compulsory. The compulsory starting age for primary school is 72 months but by parents' consents a child can start earlier but not earlier than 59 months.

the curriculum of secondary schools. In 2014, the European Court of Human Rights advised Turkey to revise the changes related to including religious classes in the school curriculum as they cause the exclusion of other religions and beliefs. However, the Turkish government claimed that compulsory religion classes do not insult any other religions or beliefs. It claimed ‘if there is a need, Alevi⁷ belief can be taught’ (ERG, 2015:83). The reason for emphasising Alevi was due to the prior warning of the European Court of Human Rights regarding ignorance of other religious beliefs and the rights of Alevi students.

2.2.1.2 School Settings

‘To see me does not necessarily mean to see my face. To understand my thoughts is to have seen me.’

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 1929⁸

Although the curriculum and textbooks have been subject to change, no changes have been directly applied to school settings. Similar to the centralisation of curriculum and textbooks, the school settings across the country are also standardised. All schools must have Atatürk statues both inside and outside of the buildings. Each classroom must also include an Atatürk corner, including preschool classrooms. There are four frames in this corner: a Turkish flag, Atatürk’s picture, the national anthem and a Declaration by Atatürk to the Turkish Youth. According to

⁷There are discussions about what Alevi means (see for details Irat, 2012). While it can be defined as a branch of Islam, it can also be defined as a syncretic faith independent from Islam. Although there are no official statistics about the population of Alevis in Turkey, it is assumed that 20 percent of the population belong to this religion.

⁸For the source see T.C. Basbakanlik Atatürk Dil, Kultur ve Tarih Yuksek Kurumu (Turkish Republic Primary Ministry of High Institution of Atatürk Language, Culture and History) (2016).

MoNE's law 85 (2) on classrooms materials, Atatürk's picture should be located above the classroom board with the Turkish flag above it and the National Anthem and Declaration by Atatürk to the Turkish Youth to the right and left of Atatürk's picture respectively.

Elmas's (2007) study shows how primary school students feel that Atatürk is observing them due to the reminders of his image in school settings. She highlights that these school settings cause children to perceive Atatürk as a powerful and mystical figure like God. This is not a surprising outcome considering the ways in which Atatürk's 'perfect' representation is made in school settings and in the curriculum and textbooks. Elmas's (2007) study suggests that children perceive him to be a very handsome figure in all of the photographs and statues. Also, in the curriculum Atatürk is portrayed as someone who turned something impossible into reality by saving this poor lonely nation from its strong enemies. The emphasis of the curriculum on Atatürk's extraordinary personality is consolidated via school settings. Elmas's (2007) study has revealed how the image of Atatürk, as the greatest national hero who was the leader of the war of independence, is the kernel of the formation of children's national identities. Primary school students stated that they owe their existence to Atatürk, when she asked them what kind of person Atatürk was in their thinking. To repay this debt, students are expected to be hardworking and follow Atatürk's reforms and principles. Children are told about Atatürk's own life story as a requirement of the curriculum; he is described as an example of an ideal citizen. His childhood experiences are specifically emphasised in the textbooks to draw children's attention. Most of the students in Elmas's research (2007) referred to Atatürk's life when they were asked which traits of Atatürk they remembered. The example that Elmas (2007) gives about how a student felt depressed because of not

doing his homework when he saw Atatürk's portrait shows this link between curriculum and school settings. The same student also stated that Atatürk's portrait smiled at her when she did her homework. This proves the power of using the image of Atatürk in school settings to discipline students.

In order to form national identities, the centralised school settings are not only an important sphere because they remind the children of Atatürk's existence constantly; they are also places in which national ceremonies take place. In the early years education programme the national days are 23rd April, National Sovereignty and Children's Day, 29th October, Republic Day and the anniversary of Atatürk's death on the 10th November (MoNE, 2013:84). In addition to these, primary schools have other days like 19th May, the Commemoration of Atatürk Youth and Sports Day, and 18th March, Çanakkale Victory and Martyrs' Day. It is compulsory for teachers and students to attend these ceremonies according to MoNE's law of ceremonies (MoNE, 2007). These ceremonies are celebrated by the whole school in front of Atatürk's statue, which is accompanied by a Turkish flag during the ceremony.

The celebration of national ceremonies is not the only time that students have to praise Atatürk and the Turkish nation. Until 2013, students in all primary school levels – *İlköğretim* – had to read a student oath every day which I still remember each word of the oath today:

‘I am a Turk, honest and hardworking.

My principle is to protect those younger than myself

and to respect my elders

to love my homeland

and my nation more than myself.

My ideal is to rise to progress.

Oh Great Atatürk !

On the path that you have paved,

I swear to walk steadfastly towards the goals you have set.

My existence shall be dedicated to the Turkish existence.

How happy is the one who says I am a Turk!’⁹

Undoubtedly, removing the compulsory celebration of national ceremonies in the sports stadiums¹⁰ in 2012 as well as citing the student oath in 2013, which emphasises the homogenous Turkish identity, has increased the tension between the current government and Kemalists.

2.3.2‘Westernised’ Education and Gender

The Kemalist ideology has implemented education to westernise the nation, which is one of the main purposes of the new Republic. So, since its establishment, the Turkish state has made a range of attempts to ‘modernise’ its education system. It accepted the Latin alphabet instead of the Arab and Persian alphabets (in 1928); John Dewey, an American educator, invited Turkey as an adviser to alter its education

⁹For the source see Öztan (2011).

¹⁰It is still compulsory to celebrate in the schools and depending on the wishes of the municipality of the region these events can still be celebrated in the stadiums.

system in a more western-progressive way (in 1924); books from Europe were translated for the purposes of teacher training (in 1960); teachers were sent to Europe to be trained in early childhood education (in 1962). These attempts could be expanded upon and they are still ongoing, as seen in the previous section about the changes related to the process of Turkey becoming an EU candidate. I am part of the project of the westernisation of the Turkish education system. I have been sent to the UK – as one of the 1000¹¹ postgraduate students who have been sent west each year, since 1924 – by the Turkish Ministry of Education to study at a doctoral level. I will not expand upon these westernisation attempts, but, relatedly with the focus of the study, I will show how gender is addressed inside the westernisation process of Turkish education by looking at specific campaigns regarding schooling rates in two different eras – the 1940s and 2000s – and textbooks.

2.3.2.1 Increasing Girls' Schooling Rates and 'Become Western'

During the transition from the Ottoman to the Kemalist era – in the early 1920s – the westernised 'new women's image' became a symbol of the new Turkish Republic (Kandiyoti, 1991). Education was the main tool in creating this new modern women's outlook through increasing their participation in public life (Sayılan, 2012). The new education system of the Republic aimed for equal participation of both sexes in mixed sex schools (Sayılan, 2012). Although mixed schools were achieved, equal participation was not. This can be seen in the literacy rates of women and men: 9.8(women) and 29.3(men) in 1930, 12.9 (w) and 36.2 (m) in 1940, 16.8 (w) and 43.7 (m) in 1945 (Yumuşak, 2004:5). Apparently, the traditional culture of Turkish society prevented women from participating in the different parts of society and

¹¹The number of students was subject to change every year. However, in 2005 the number was fixed at 1000.

attending schools and the Kemalists' aim of gender equality did not apply to women in rural areas or people from low class backgrounds (Sayılan, 2012). In other words, it was mostly middle and high-class women in the big cities that enjoyed the 'westernisation' of the education system. Although in the early years of the Republic the number of Turkish women employed in highly skilled jobs such as medicine reached the highest in Europe, in the early years of the Republic (Acar, 1994) this picture was only true for 'particular women' in Turkey.

The Kemalist ideology tried to overcome its flaws by including the different parts of society in the education system and opening the Village Institutions – *Köy Enstitüleri* – in 1940, after being inspired by John Dewey's ideas. However, these were closed in 1954. Those rural based education institutions did not particularly focus on gender equality, but aimed to achieve rural development in general, which, consequently, led to erasing the negative effects of traditional culture on women's education. The institutions selected students from the villages and trained them for 5 years to become primary school teachers and agricultural technicians. Then the graduates returned and taught these skills to students and other people in their own villages. The plan aimed to serve rural development through education. However, we could say that in the 1950s rural women's equal participation was not achieved despite the establishment of the Village Institutions. Although this could be because of their short life – just 14 years – we do not have any proof that they could have achieved equal participation if they had not been closed. The understanding of gender inequality has remained in the society and so the girls' schooling rate has been still an issue in Turkey.

More recently, various campaigns and projects have been conducted by private and civil institutions with the aim of achieving gender equality in education, such as ‘The Girls’ Education’ (Haydi Kızlar Okula!), ‘Father let me go to school’ (Baba beni okula gönder), ‘Daughter-Mother are in School’ (Ana-kız okuldayız) (Atlama & Özsoy, 2009). The Girls’ Education Campaign in Turkey (Haydi Kizlar Okula!) was the biggest campaign in Turkey in recent years and the ‘western’ effect was not missing. MoNE conducted a campaign along with UNICEF between 2003 and 2005.

The aim was to increase girls’ primary level enrolment rate in the regions, which was the lowest in Turkey (see Table 2.2). It was launched in Van, which is located in the south eastern part of Turkey, and initially another 10 south-eastern provinces and later 24 other provinces were included in the campaign. The former Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and many celebrities participated in television commercials to draw the public’s attention. MoNE provided free textbooks, visited families who were not sending their girls to school, and funded schooling for girls from poor families during the two-year campaign period. As a result, 273,447 girls were identified as being out of school, and by the end of the campaign 81% of these girls had enrolled.

Although girls’ schooling rates have been increasing with these efforts, Derince (2012) finds this campaign very problematic due to its facile focus. Because of the location of the campaign, the girls who were involved were Kurdish. However, according to him, these girls’ ethnic identity was underestimated during the campaign and this caused the campaign to fail to propose solid conclusions. Moreover, Derince (2012) has suggested that the campaign targeted girls, not because of the unequal schooling rate as seen in Table 2.2 (Yumusak, 2004), but

because of the Turkish state's aim of assimilation of a Kurdish identity, since girls become mothers and teach their native language to their children. But, in the case of the schooling of Kurdish girls inside the Turkish schools with Turkish language, according to Derince (2012), those women will be assimilated, and this leads to the assimilation of the Kurdish culture in the long term. Instead of this kind of campaign, he has underlined the necessity of educating Kurdish girls or boys in their native languages. Furthermore, Derince (2012) has pointed out that the campaign had a tendency to see uneducated girls as backward and passive, and so it aimed to 'save' those women without taking into consideration their own culture. Surprisingly, Derince's criticisms are very similar to criticisms of the Kemalist ideology, which are made especially by supporters of the current Turkish government, the AKP, as the campaign was conducted in the period when they were ruling the country. Some religious people in Turkey, most of them AKP supporters, have criticised Kemalism for being too elite, ignoring the culture of the country and changing the alphabet with the aim of assimilating the religious population by cutting their relationship with their past. But of course this similarity is not surprising. As seen above, the current Turkish government sustains the elements of the Kemalist ideology in the education system. This is similar to the following section where I look at the gender inequalities in textbooks.

Regions	Total	Boys	Girls	Girls %
Marmara region	413 163	214 894	198 269	47,99
Aegean region	343 881	177 266	166 615	48,45
Mediterranean region	399 672	211 574	188 098	47,06
Central Anatolia region	376 597	192 868	183 729	48,79
The Black Sea region	448 819	231 491	217 328	48,42
Eastern Anatolian region	468 331	269 517	198 814	42,45
South Eastern Anatolia region	437 342	253 587	183 755	42,02
Total	2 887 805	1 551 197	1 336 608	46,28

Table 2.2 The schooling rate of boys and girls divided by regions in 2002 – before the campaign starts

2.3.2.2 Still Gender Stereotypes in ‘Textbooks’

Textbooks, by which I mean early education and primary school textbooks, have portrayed women, and still do portray them (Sayılan, 2012), as helpers of men or as carers. In Turkish education, students at an early age see in their textbooks and are taught that women carried the armaments for the men who fought in the War of Independence; women fed the soldiers; women were mothers and teachers; they were not lawyers (Kancı&Altınay, 2011). The evidence of this rigid occupation segregation and the division between the public and private spheres in the textbooks has been found by many Turkish scholars. For instance, drawing on 26 preschool picture books, Gürşimşek and Günay’s (2005) study noted that women are represented as flight attendants, teachers and singers, whereas men are shown as doctors, pilots and architects. Gürşimşek & Günay (2005), moreover, highlighted that women are shown at home while men are illustrated in the work place. When we

look at women's representations in the household in the textbooks, Eslen-Ziya and Erhart's study (2013) demonstrates that in 58 preschool picture books that they analysed women are shown as mothers of nuclear families. There is no place for different forms of sexuality in these books. Another study, which was conducted by Esen & Bagli in 2002, supports these findings through highlighting that women and men are always presented with children in the heterosexual family form in illustrations for Turkish and alphabet books for elementary schools, in the first grade. They note that the traditional gender roles of women and men in the nuclear family predominate in these books: women are shown in the private home environment and men are shown in the public work environment. On the other hand, Seç-Bir (2012) discusses some recent developments in the textbooks regarding gender inequality. The report is based on the analysis of social science books for the first to eight grades and it highlights changes regarding the increasing number of representations of women in public spaces and in 'traditional male' occupations. However, their main role is still highlighted as 'mothers'.

In the light of the above discussion, we can say that while the integration of the EU process has led to some changes regarding the representation of national discourses in the curriculum and textbooks, the process has not made a positive contribution to more equal gender representations in the curriculum. When we consider the 'claim' of MoNE saying that the curriculum was 'gender-neutral' this is not surprising. Therefore, the changes in the textbooks, which are only mentioned in Seç-bir's study (2012), are seen as consequences of urbanisation and the increasing number of educated women in the last 10 years. These circumstances have led to an increase in women's participation in paid employment, and thus the textbooks and curriculum have indirectly been adapted to these changes (Seç-bir, 2012).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the structure of early childhood institutions in Turkey as well as the place of national and gender discourses in the broader Turkish education system within two sections.

In the first section, early childhood education institutions were explored. The differences between institutions were highlighted and public preschool institutions were examined in terms of their curriculum, teacher recruitment and training and operational features such as opening hours. This section has proved that the early childhood institutions are inseparable parts of a centralised broader education system in Turkey, which is discussed in the second section of the chapter.

The second section highlighted how the Turkish education system is centralised as well as westernised by the application of national and gender discourses. The first part indicated how, through centralised textbooks, curriculum and school settings, the national ideology of the country is taught to students at different levels. The image of Atatürk is as an important indicator in shaping the national identities of children, especially in their early years education. The second part of this section concentrated on the deployment of gender equality by Turkish Republic as a way of ‘becoming western’, especially in the early years. The increasing girls’ schooling rate has been one of the main objectives of education policy since the establishment of the republic. The chapter has tackled two important campaigns about girls’ schooling rates in two different eras. Although the first one did not merely focus on girls’ schooling but also on rural development, an increase in girls’ schooling was a consequence. The section also tried to discuss their similarities in terms of being ‘westernised’. Apparently, one of the campaigns was based on the ideas of American educator, John Dewey, and the other was conducted with the alliance of UNICEF.

Finally, the chapter looked at representations of men and women in textbooks. This focus demonstrated that the reasons for unequal school participation run deeper; they lie in the 'unequal' gender ideologies that are taught to students in the classrooms via picturing women in their homes and men in public places.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to justify and explain the choices of methods employed in this research. Firstly, the theoretical underpinning of my case study research and how it relates to research aims and questions will be explained. In this discussion, children's position in their identity construction will be argued in relation to adult/child generational relations and also power relations between them. Furthermore it will be explained why the methodology and methods I have used are the most appropriate in this context. The following part explains the process of research design by looking how research subjects played a part in shaping this process which is revealed with the examples from the pilot study and the fieldwork. After introducing the two research schools 'Nar' and 'Mavi' in terms of facilities and contexts of school and preschool classrooms, the process of accessing the schools, the application of research methods and data analysis will be detailed by discussing the issues and challenges through these processes. I will also outline ethical considerations in relation to my research context by positioning myself as a researcher.

3.2 Case Study

I am interested in how children construct gender and national identities in relation to early years policy and practices. This research is less focused on correcting 'what is already said' than on understanding and answering 'how' and 'why' questions focused on a specific case (Yin, 2003). When 'how' and 'why' questions are posed,

case studies are one of the preferred strategies of response; thus, a qualitative case study was chosen to provide an in-depth account of children's experiences in relation to education. Case study research examines phenomena within their specific context together with collected, detailed data. Case studies try to answer questions by concentrating on, comprehending and defining people, communities, groups or pertinent instances from real life.

The researcher needs to decide whether having a single or a multiple case study is better for answering the research questions. While a single case study can be chosen to research an extreme, unique or revelatory case, multiple cases allow the researcher to contrast, confirm or represent theoretically diverse cases (Yin, 2003). This research has focused on two schools, in order to reveal the differences as well as similarities of their application of policies and practices. When the focus is not on particular teachers, schools or students, but, for instance, on the practices of teachers or on how policies are shaped by teachers, this kind of case study is defined as an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). As an instrumental case study, this research does not attempt to make generalisations; rather it aims to examine the relationship between preschools and children's engagement with these institutions in the construction of their identities.

The next step was to decide which schools needed to be chosen to best reveal the relationship between preschools and children's identity construction. At this stage, Stake (1995) states that cases should extend our knowledge of the subject by confirming or changing prior assumptions. In terms of the research questions of this study, state schools offered more opportunities to understand national policies and practices which are determined by centralised bodies. The other criteria Stake (1995)

raises are time and access issues when doing fieldwork. These issues carry importance because researchers have limitations, having to complete their research by a certain time. To solve time and access problems, I chose two state schools which were located close to my family home.

3.3 Being or becoming?

In order to introduce the cases of this research I would like to explain how this study understands children, generational issues between adults and children and power relations. The choice of methods and the process of designing this research were shaped by these understandings. First of all, there is no universal definition of children for this study; rather there are different children and childhoods (James et al., 1998). According to Connolly (2008:173), 'there is no universal form that either race, gender or childhood takes but rather they tend to vary as they reflect the particular, social, political and economic forces that are at play within specific context'. By placing nationality near to race, gender and childhood in Connolly's statement, this research does not hold the belief that these social dimensions have natural or particular forms; rather they are socially constructed in specific times and contexts. Children are at the centre of the creation of their gender and national identities; therefore it is necessary to 'unpack' their knowledge and understandings.

The importance of children's roles in their experiences has been recognised especially by the works of the sociology of childhood (James et. al, 1998). Sharing the same ideal with feminist standpoint epistemology (Hartsock, 1983; Harding, 1991), the studies in this discipline attempt to understand children's lives based on their experiences. Adult-based understanding and definitions have been disturbed by those that aim to consider children's own understandings. The image of the child in

these studies is of the powerful, competent and socially active child (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Moss & Petrie, 2002). While children are shaped by society, they also take a part in shaping society (James & Prout, 1997). This understanding of children leads a shift from research on children to research with children (Hood et al., 1996; Christensen & James, 2000).

Although recognising children's agency opens up new ways to understand and do research with children, Lee (1998) finds that the essential way of seeing agency and accepting all children as competent is problematic. According to Lee (1998), defining agency as a property of each individual shuts the door on understanding the incomplete nature of the social world. Children's ontological status shifts from immature and incomplete to active and competent in the new sociology of childhood studies; but Lee (1998) points out that rather than seeing children as being or as becoming, accepting children's ambiguous ontological status can open up possibilities to understand children's unfinished world better:

Childhood can open the door on an unfinished world because childhood cannot be finished. It is neither a state of 'being' nor a state of 'becoming'. Instead it continually poses the question of being and becoming as it moves through the social, disturbing social ordering practices and calling for temporary resolutions as it goes. (Lee, 1998:465)

Cocks (2006) agrees that Lee's approach to agency provides the researcher with a place to see the social world clearly because agency is not a fixed property that each child has, rather it is fluid. Cocks (2006) reminds us that admitting all children are competent dismisses and excludes children who have dependencies, for example, disabled or refugee children. Hence agency for both children and adults should not

be treated as an essential possession. In the light of these ideas, this study does not overestimate children's subjectivity; it is strongly aware of the possible effects of the social world on their lives. Therefore, it gives accounts of the vital components of education systems – teachers' perspective, policy documents and practices – to understand their implicit and explicit meanings in children's lives.

At this point, one of the first things that need to be considered is to understand adult/child relationships in research because there are unequal power relations between them. Mayall (2002) points out this necessity by emphasising that generational issues inevitably influence research methods. According to Mayall, there is an imbalance in the adult/child relation in research in developmental psychology because the 'researcher aims to improve knowledge of children's position and progress on the journey to adult maturity, and therefore the researcher takes a detached observer role' (2002:110). Contrary to this dominant framework, the studies that take children's accounts to understand their lives need to challenge the imbalance in generational issues. Thorne (1993:12) warns that 'to learn from children, adults have to challenge the deep assumption that they already know what children are "like", both because, as former children, adults have been there, and because, as adults, they regard children as less complete versions of themselves'. These assumptions restrict researchers' ways to hear children's voices because seeing the adult complete version of children gives more power to adults.

On the other hand, as Punch (2002) points out, not just seeing children entirely different from adults, but also seeing them the same as adults affects the ways of listening to children. Seeing children and adults as the same can overlook the unequal power relations between them. Hence it is necessary to consider power

relations to understand children better, especially in contexts like schools where the adult/child division is rigid (Hill, 2006). It is difficult to say that adult and child status is equal in schools; rather, most of the time, adults are the authority and children are under the control of this authority. Consequently, the power relations between adults and children in the school context influence the research process due to the hierarchical context (James et al., 1998). For instance, the researcher needs to pass gatekeepers to access children in schools, which will be discussed later, because it is not possible to ask children's consent without the permission of adults who are parents, teachers and head teachers and assistants of head teachers. This proves the dependencies that children have in schools. Therefore, rather than standing on one extreme point about the adult/child difference and sameness issue (Punch, 2002), this research aims to negotiate with the subjects within power relations in a particular time and place.

According to Foucault and Gordon (1980:119), power has multiple forms and 'a productive network which runs through the whole social body'. Hence in this research, power is something that 'moves between different actors and different social positions, it is produced and negotiated in the social interactions of child to adult, child to child and adult to adult in the local settings of the research' (Christensen, 2004:175). This fluidity sometimes gives power to a child and sometimes to an adult; therefore, this study does not see power as static held by adults or adult-led macro structures.

Scholars have been arguing the role of the researcher in fieldwork by discussing power relations between researcher and children (Mandell, 1991; Christensen, 2004; Randall, 2012). According to Mandell's (1991) 'least adult role', adult researchers

join children's activities by imitating their words and behaviour in order to minimise social differences between adults and children. However, it is difficult to say that children or adults ignore inherited differences between children and adult, such as physical differences (Christensen, 2004). Thus, rather than ignoring unequal power relations and differences between individuals, the researcher can engage with children to listen to them better by minimising social differences between adults and children, valuing children's social world and trying to find shared meanings with children (Randell, 2012:40).

In addition, the researcher's role is not static and does not solely depend on the researcher's approach to adult/child relations. It is shaped by the relations between researcher and both adults and children in a specific time and context. For instance, in Connolly's (2008) study with 5–6-year-old children in a primary school of England, he found himself in a contradictory position: on the one hand, he was expected to behave as a teacher to intervene in incidents like children fighting and dangerous situations, and on the other hand he was someone that children could trust and share their thoughts with. Similarly, Thorne (1993:19) encountered teachers who demanded the researcher behave as an adult that they can make allegiances with such as making eye contact 'literally above the heads of the kids' to share their approval or disapproval about what children did. Thorne felt that sometimes she moved into these allegiances because there were some advantages of being an adult and having authority. Moreover, not just adults but also children can expect researchers to behave in the same hierarchical relations. Children can approach outsiders as teachers by calling them 'teacher' or be afraid of breaking the rules in their presence (Hill, 2006).

The research process consists of relations which can go beyond child/adult dualism and relations which cannot break this dualism. Similar to the above examples, I found myself in a contradictory position in the schools. Due to the teacher-centred education system in Turkey, both the teachers and the children tended to see me as an adult who can control children and assess their tasks. While the teachers wanted me to help the children in their tasks, the children asked for my help to correct their work, which will be detailed with examples in the participant observation part. The strategy to deal with this contradictory position was not rejecting or accepting completely what was offered but negotiating the situation. For instance, if a child asked for my help about something I could do (such as writing a letter), I did not refuse to help so as not to be seen as an authority, but or when a child asked for my help about something I could not do (for example, I cannot draw well), I did not try to help because it could cause the assumption that adults can do everything better than children.

Regarding the methods used in research, the studies trying to learn from children tend to use qualitative methods (Clark et al., 2005; Christensen & James, 2000; Hill, 2006). Here, another important question needs to be considered: are the methods used with children different or the same as the methods used with adults? This debate follows the same line as the discussion of adult/child generational issues. If children are seen as incompetent to explain their thoughts with traditional research methods then should we have specific methods for children? According to Christensen (2004:165), it is not necessary to use particular methods when researching with children because she gives primary importance to see children as fellow human beings. Punch (2002) points out that by using child-friendly methods adults assume that (1) children enjoy fun methods, (2) children are not as competent as adults and

(3) they have limited concentration spans. In that sense, the methods should not be chosen because participants are children. Instead, the chosen methods should keep participants' interest and willingness to explore themselves.

As a soft version of Christensen's (2004) claim, Punch (2002) offers to combine traditional research methods with techniques seen as suitable for use with children. The reason why she suggests using traditional methods with such techniques is that 'children tend to lack experience of communicating directly with unfamiliar adults in a one-to-one situation, a more innovative approach such as using task-based methods can enable children to feel more comfortable with an adult researcher' (Punch, 2002:330). Despite it still being difficult to assume that each child expresses his or her thought with these task-based techniques better (Harden et al., 2000), some techniques can be used to make research methods more interesting for both children and adults; therefore, the methods chosen for this study are research friendly techniques rather than child-friendly (Punch, 2002).

3.4 Research Design

I shall now explain how I designed my research as a qualitative study. I was interested in children's usage of early years' policies and practices in their gender and national identity construction. In order to find out how children engage with these discourses, I needed to engage with both children and other actors of preschool settings. I divided my research subjects into two parts, children and school, but not as opposed to each other or as a binary group, rather to see their relations clearly. I focused on the school part to find out how gender and national identities are represented in the Turkish education system and what messages schools convey to create certain forms of identities. On the other hand, the children's part concerned

the questions of how children interpret and reproduce these discourses and how they tend to construct their gender and national identities.

The study does not deal with any specific conditions such as schools in areas of low or high socio-economic status or areas populated by immigrants, because rather than discussing these kinds of conditions and possible influences, the study deals with how teachers and schools apply the policies and practices in early years education and more importantly children's engagement with these. Reducing data results, for instance, to economic conditions prevents seeing diverse influences on children's complex social relations, which is one of the main concerns of this research.

I conducted a pilot study to clarify my research design. The pilot study focused on 4–5-year-old children in a preschool classroom and 5–7-year-old children at elementary level 1. As a state primary school, 'Nar' was chosen due to its location. Conducting research in two classrooms was the initial idea to observe teachers' application and the transition from less structured preschool to more structured primary level practises. After access was gained from the Ministry of National Education, the consent of the head teacher, the teachers and the children were obtained which will be detailed in the access and consent part. I spent 7 days attending the elementary level 1 and 7 days with the preschool classroom. During the pilot study I used participant observation and focus group and interview methods.

At the end of the pilot study two decisions were made about sampling and methods. Firstly I decided to focus on preschool classes only otherwise the focus of the study could become a comparison between preschool classroom and primary school grade 1 classroom. Although having two classrooms invites a comparison, my aim was not to compare the differences between primary level and preschool class practices, but

how children engage with early years' policy and practices; therefore, I decided to conduct my research with two preschool classes in Nar. In addition to this decision, I found it difficult to use the focus group method because some children spoke more than others and the others generally repeated the talkative children's words. I think this also relates to the Turkish education system because children are encouraged to repeat what they are told rather than explain their thoughts. Hence some children may be afraid to give 'wrong' answers, even though there are no wrong or right answers, in the presence of peers and an adult (Harden et al., 2000). It has been argued that having four and five participants can be efficient for a focus group (Morgan et al., 2002). However, in my pilot study I could not follow the conversation of five children because rather than the number of participants the dynamic of the group influenced the flow of the conversation. The other difficulty of the focus group was transcribing. After listening several times, it was hard to hear some children's voices due to the outspoken children. Therefore I decided to conduct one-to-one interviews. Undoubtedly, this is a researcher-led decision and it may dismiss that some children express themselves better in a group but at the same time it opens possibilities for some children to express their thoughts without peer pressure.

It is possible to say that piloting my methods was also about seeing my position in the field study because I did not have prior experience, either as a researcher or as a teacher in schools. It gave me a chance to see myself in the fieldwork because the engagement between researcher and researched creates possibilities for the researcher to learn about her- or himself and her or his respondents (Davis, 1998). This learning process builds new and dynamic relations: after piloting my research design, I understood that research is multidimensional and an unpredictable process;

therefore, it is important to be reflexive to flow within it, which will be detailed later in ‘reflexivity section’. Another incident at the beginning of my field study in Nar proved to be the changeable nature of research. At the end of the pilot study, I decided to conduct my research in two preschool classrooms of Nar school as stated earlier. Then I would have the chance to see the differences between the teachers’ application and the children’s engagement with these differences. However, one of the teachers did not accept me due to an intern¹² in the classroom already being there as an extra person. Her rejection led me to revise my design. There were two questions: whether to continue my study with one classroom or two classrooms one in Nar and another one in a different school. Eventually, I decided to start my research in Nar and my research process led me to continue my fieldwork in Mavi. During my fieldwork in Nar I had some difficulties, which will be mentioned in the participant observation section. After assessing my personal and academic concerns, I decided to continue my fieldwork in another preschool classroom in a different primary school which is located in the same catchment area. As a result, the research was conducted in ‘Nar’s’ and ‘Mavi’s’ preschool classrooms which I will refer to as Nar and Mavi too.

3.5 Research schools: Nar and Mavi

In this section, I will introduce the two preschool classrooms using details from the webpage of MoNE.¹³ All names in the following are pseudonyms, including the schools’ names of Nar and Mavi and the names of the research subjects (see

¹²Interns are students who either study in 4-year teacher training programme in universities or in vocational high schools about child development. They have teaching practice in early years institutions for short and long periods.

¹³On this website, schools of MoNE are introduced by giving general information like the history of school, staff, the number of students, conditions. (<http://www.meb.gov.tr>, access date: October 2014)

Appendix 2). First of all, both schools are located in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. As the second biggest city after Istanbul it has a population of just over 5 million (TÜİK, 2013). The city is known as the governmental centre of Turkey since the assembly and all other public service centres are located there. When I was at primary school, we were taught that Atatürk decided to make Ankara the capital city of Turkey because it connects the west and east of the country by being situated in the middle. Both schools are located in the Batıkent province of Ankara, where I have lived for nearly 15 years. Batıkent was built based on a Kent-Coop union housing project¹⁴ to connect the western part of Ankara to the city. The project was started in 1974 and since then, through the participation of other unions, the province has been expanded. In the first twenty years, this area mostly accommodated a working class population, but in recent years, it has become known as a middle class area, with a population of 215,330 (TÜİK, 2014).

Both schools are located in the same catchment area in Batıkent and they are a 15-minute walk from each other. It can be said that most of the families of the students come from middle income groups. The ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the students seem homogenous, as stated in teacher Zehra's (preschool teacher of Mavi) 'Our school' document (not dated): 'People living in this neighbourhood are Muslim and Turkish. There are just a few foreigners who live around. The language is Turkish...' Despite teacher Zehra saying that this document was prepared a couple of years ago to document general school information, it still gives an idea of the homogenous features of the area. Turkey has neither a colonial history nor a multicultural educational background. However, this does not mean that there are no

¹⁴ For details about the Batıkent housing project see: <http://www.unesco.org/most/easteur1.htm>, accessdate: October 2014.

cultural, religious or ethnic differences between the children in Turkey although it is hard to say that these differences are visible in the school context. In addition, in recent years, the Syrian immigrant population has been increasing in the area. However, during my fieldwork there were no Syrian children in the classrooms.

Mavi was one of the first schools to open in Batıkent; this happened in 1977. Three years after the school had opened, the integration of new school buildings was celebrated, with the president of Turkey, Kenan Evren, present, who was a military officer and the 7th president of Turkey between 1980 and 1989. Nar does not have any special occasions in its history; it opened in 1996. The schools have the same management structure, staffs are employed in the same way and the same curriculum is applied in class, as required by the MoNE. However, the interpretation of rules and regulations can create some differences. While Nar can be seen as more moderate in following the rules and regulations of the MoNE, Mavi has more structured ways of applying them, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. There are also some other differences between the two schools in terms of their population, time schedule and physical spaces, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 The differences between Nar and Mavi

Mavi – School	Nar – School
660 students – 40 teachers	320 students – 23 teachers
a head teacher, two assistants of head teachers	a head teacher, an assistant of head teacher
part-time schedule (morning and afternoon)	full time schedule
sports hall which is also used for conferences.	sports hall in the basement.
two separate school buildings with a small school garden.	one building with a large school garden.

I conducted my fieldwork with the morning preschool classes of both schools due to the availability of the teachers. Both preschool classrooms have a teacher and an assistant teacher to lead the classroom activities. Teacher Zehra from Mavi graduated from the Children's Development and Education Department at Gazi University, Ankara. She had 34 years teaching experience, of which 22 years had been spent in Mavi. As an experienced teacher in the Turkish education system, she had been working as a preschool teacher in state schools. On the other hand, teacher Fatma's background was not directly related to teaching in preschools. She graduated from the School of Home Economics at Hacettepe University, Ankara, which aimed to teach graduates how to manage domestic life economically, culturally and socially. Teacher Fatma had 20 years' teaching experience in state preschools and had been at Nar for five years. Both assistant teachers had only worked in state preschools. The assistant teacher of Mavi, Sevgi abla, had been working as an assistant for 14 years - nine years in Mavi. Nar was the only school in Elif abla's working history where she had assisted three teachers in eight years.

Both classrooms had a similar number of students, aged between 4 and 6. In Nar, there were 22 children - 15 boys, 7 girls - and in Mavi there were 25 - 18 boys and 7 girls. The size of the classroom in Nar was not small, approx. 25 square metres, but it was not big enough for the children to play freely. There was also a small room in the classroom for materials and it was good to have this room so that I could conduct my interviews in a separate place (see Figure 3.1). Mavi had a larger classroom and an extra space as a play area (see Figure 3.2); the children thus had more space than the children in Nar. The children had extra classes like chess and drama in Mavi and they used spaces outside of the classroom to attend these classes. In Nar, children mainly spent their time in the classroom and they did not have any extra classes.

Teacher Fatma stated that they sometimes went to the school garden in the summer time. It is fair to say that compared to Mavi, this limited usage of space restricted the children's engagement with the rest of the school.

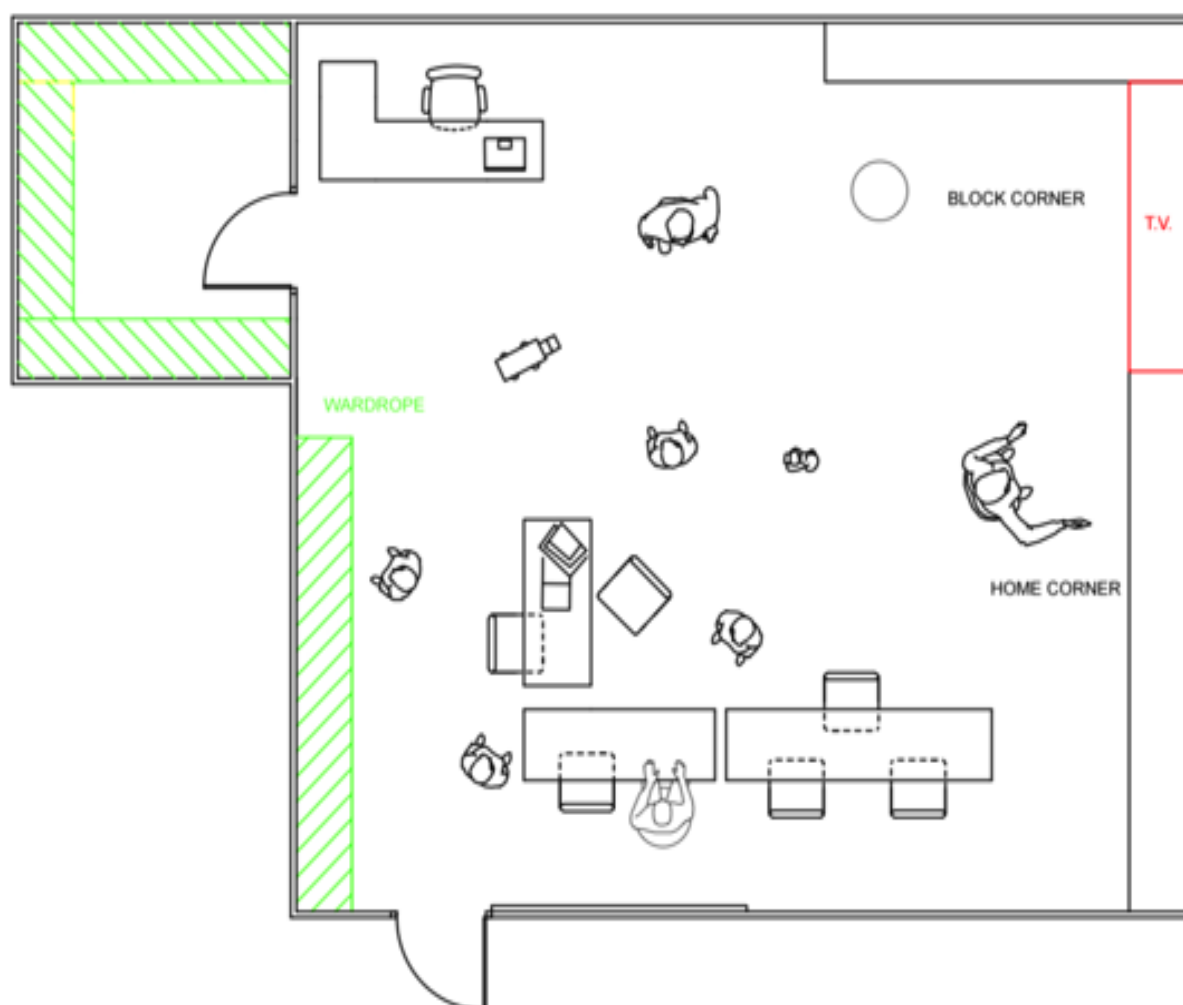


Figure 3.1 Preschool classroom of Nar

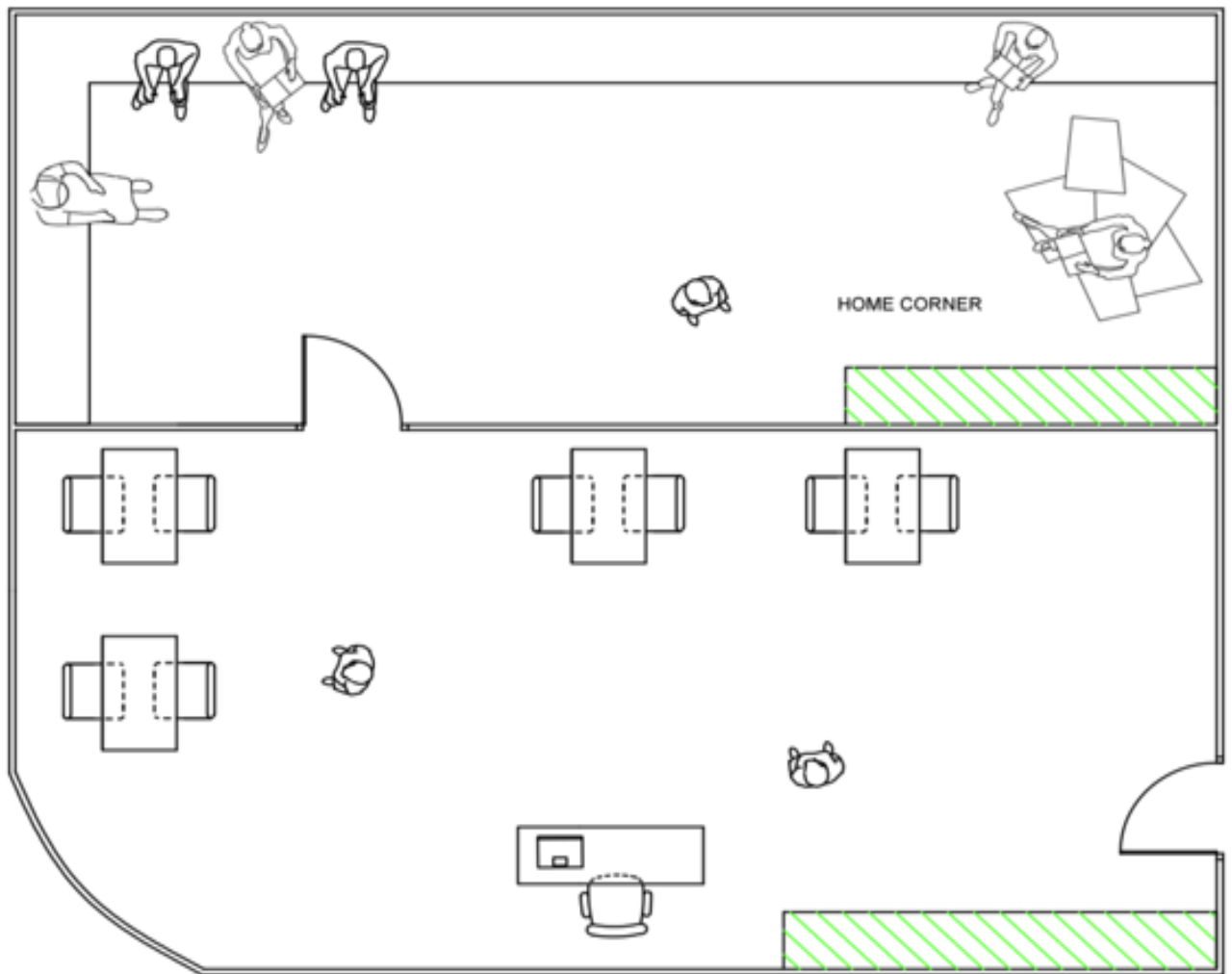


Figure 3.2 Preschool classroom of Mavi

3.6 Access and Consent

Accessing schools and children is a process that requires formal and personal agreements between the researcher and gatekeepers. The main requirement to access schools in Turkey is preparing a report which explains research aims and methods to ask permission of MoNE. This report is assessed by MoNE's Education Strategies Department, then the local authority is informed about the research. As the last step, the local authority sends the permission letter to the school where the researcher

wants to conduct research. I followed this route to negotiate with all the gatekeepers, who were MoNE, the head teachers, the parents and the teachers, in order to establish access to the children. Hood et al. (1996) name this top down process as the 'hierarchy of gatekeeping'. To open these gates the researcher again needs to deal with the image of children in the minds of gatekeepers and power relations between children and adults. In the following I will present how I dealt with the hierarchy of gatekeeping.

The access process was repeated three times for this research: one for the pilot study in Nar, one for conducting research in Nar and one for conducting research in Mavi. Each time I needed to obtain permission from MoNE to access the schools. I prepared a report, as mentioned earlier, which explained the research subject, methods and duration of the research in the schools. After examining these reports, MoNE informed the local education authority and then this body sent a letter to the schools that approved my research. Due to all schools and local authorities being linked with MoNE and not able to make decisions independently, I assumed that this process could be time-consuming; therefore, I followed my documents and contacted the related departments personally to shorten this period. However, it did not change the fact that getting permission from MoNE was the longest period in the fieldwork and took approximately a month for each stage.

At the top of the hierarchy, MoNE was my important reference point to open up other gates. Due to head teachers and teachers working under the rules and regulations of MoNE, they tended to rely on this body's permission, but not all of them as one of the teachers did not accept me. But first I would like to discuss the head teachers' role as the second level of the hierarchy. The head teachers (HTs) of

Nar and Mavi accepted me in their schools for different reasons. The head teacher (HT) of Nar had concerns about providing me with funding, which was not the case. Schools have to pay interns during their internship and his lack of experience with researchers made the HT follow the same rule for researchers. After explaining that my research position did not require any payment, he did not find any problem to accept me. On the other hand, the HT of Mavi accepted me because of the usefulness of my research (Hood et al., 1996) for Mavi. Despite the research not aiming to improve or develop school practices, the HT of Mavi believed that studying PhD in different country could contribute to school practices.

After the negotiation with the HTs, it was necessary to obtain the teachers' consent. Teachers play a crucial role in this process as one of the teacher's refusal changed my research design. As can be seen from this example, research subjects have the right to say 'no' before, during or after research (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). It is important to keep this freedom for participants; otherwise the obligation to participate can create a tense environment. Teacher Fatma and teacher Zehra accepted my presence in their classrooms without any problem. I did not have any difficulties to be accepted in Nar since I had already met teacher Fatma in my pilot study. In Mavi, one of the head teacher's assistant introduced me to teacher Zehra, which eased my entrance to the classroom. I also met the assistant teachers: Elif abla¹⁵ and Sevgi abla, who both agreed to give their consent.

As the last gatekeeper to access the children, their parents' consent was gathered with the help of the teachers and the assistant teachers. In the parents' consent letter I

¹⁵The direct translation of 'Abla' is elder sister, but it is also used to call someone older than even you do not have any kinship relations. There is no word match in English; therefore, I shall use 'abla' in the text.

mentioned that I was a PhD student at the University of Warwick and that I was researching the relation between children and preschool. I also wrote about the duration of my presence in the class and that in this period I would be doing observation of and interviews with the children. Teachers are important bridges to get parents' consent. For instance, before starting to get the consent of the parents in Nar, I had a chance to attend the regular meetings of parents and teacher Fatma. I had a chance to explain my role as a researcher to the parents and teacher Fatma told them that she knew me; then nobody asked me any questions about my research. Some parents - even without reading the letter - said that if teacher Fatma accepted it, it was not necessary to ask parents' consent, but I explained that their permission was also important for my study. This approach of parents is cultural. There is an idiom as 'the flesh is yours, the bones are mine' in the Turkish language, which is used to emphasise parents' trust in teachers' decisions. Similarly, teacher Zehra closely engaged with my consent process with the parents in Mavi. In addition, Elif abla and Sevgi abla played a part to gather parents' consent letters because they met parents when they brought the children to the classrooms.

I needed to negotiate with the children because children are also gatekeepers deciding the researcher's access to their world (Davis et al., 2000). Despite a hierarchical process being followed to access the children, children's refusal or acceptance to participate is just as important as the refusal or acceptance of adult research participants. In the sociology of childhood, children as social actors are competent enough to express their thoughts and feelings (James and Prout, 1997); therefore, they have agency to decide whether to participate in research. However, as stated earlier, Cocks (2006:256) suggests that researchers need to move away from the restrictions of defining competence in order to find an inclusive method of

gaining consent. Rather than accepting all children as competent enough to give informed consent, 'accepting incompetence and dependence' (Cocks, 2006:255) can help to understand children's positions in context. In this sense, assent is one of the ways that opens up possibilities to see the ongoing relationship between researcher and children.

On the other hand, Alderson and Morrow (2011:103) criticise the term 'assent' due to three reasons: (1) it refers to agreement by minors who have no legal right to consent, (2) assent refers to agreement by children who understand some but not all the main issues required for consent, (3) assent can mean 'at least not refusing'. However, informed consent does not guarantee that children fully understand what research is about, especially in the school environment. Children who are required to participate in research in schools may not feel in a position to dissent, simply because most (if not all) tasks and activities in school are compulsory (Morrow & Richards, 1996:101).

This study does not hold the belief that informed consent is a guarantee of children's participation in the school context; rather children's participation highly depends on the school context, the teachers' approach and the relationship between the researcher and children. For instance, both of the teachers tried to encourage the children to participate, and the teachers' opinion is most important for the children because of the teacher-centred education system in Turkey. However, I still asked the children's agreement individually before the one-to-one interviews in which all of them agreed to participate. I also reminded them that they could withdraw if they did not feel comfortable being part of this study. This approach revealed that children are important and their decisions are considered regardless of what their teacher says.

While some children understood this division by asking about my research and the questions they would be asked, some seemed to follow the teachers without questioning their positions.

3.7 Research Methods

3.7.1 Participant Observation

Observing research subjects in their environment is important to understand the ongoing process of their social relations. Building a relationship with the researched takes time and effort, but this process is crucial to understanding what participants' meanings are (Peters & Kelly, 2011). The subjectivity of researcher influence, the way of hearing participants' meanings and participant observation allow the researcher to see his or her own position while trying to understand others. Hence observation is not a one way process; it is closely linked with the relations of observer and observed. In this part, I will explain how the relations between me and the research participants influenced my position as a researcher.

Compared to Mavi, I had more chance to learn from research subjects in Nar because teacher Zehra had plans for each day, but teacher Fatma decided the classroom activities according to 'the plan in her mind'. Teacher Fatma's fluidity gave me more chance to be part of classroom activities, but for teacher Zehra applying her plan was the most important thing and all distractions should be avoided to keep the classroom routine. Thus, while in Nar I could talk and sit with the children all the time, in Mavi teacher Zehra decided when I could speak and sit with the children except in free play times. For instance, when I started to talk with the children while they were drawing, teacher Zehra told me to come and sit near to the teacher's table. Therefore, I thought using the least adult role (Mandell, 1991) might work better to blend in

with the children; however, due to the children being keen to talk with me more than engaging with their tasks, I was not allowed to stay close to the children during table activities.

3.7.1.1 Researcher Role

As stated earlier, my researcher role in the field work does not see children as an incomplete version of adults or ignore the imbalanced power relations between children and adults similar to Christensen's unusual adult role (2004). According to this role, the researcher:

who is seriously interested in understanding how the social world looks from a child's perspective but without making a dubious attempt to be a child. Through this the researcher emerges first and foremost as a social person and secondly as a professional with a distinctive and genuine purpose.
(Christensen, 2004:174).

Despite intending to play this role, my research participants' understandings influenced my role during my 5 weeks in each classroom.

Firstly, both teachers stated that their classrooms had no prior experience with researchers in their settings. It was not surprising to hear this because the literature in the Turkish context begs for studies which involve preschoolers [to learn from them]. On the other hand, the teachers were familiar with interns in their classrooms who practise teaching in different periods of the year. Therefore, a 'stranger' in the classroom mainly refers to someone practising teaching for the children and the teachers. This familiarity made it difficult to explain my researcher role particularly to the teachers and sometimes to the children and the assistant teachers.

It can be said that in both classrooms there were hierarchical relations between adults and children and also between adults. The places of the teachers, their assistants and the children in this hierarchy were based on teachers', assistants' and children' educational status and adult/child status. It is fair to say that educational status can be important for some, especially in educational institutions in Turkey. Therefore, in this hierarchy, educational status plays a great role. Not surprisingly, the teachers were at the top of this hierarchy; they plan activities and control the classroom as the most educated persons. Their engagement with the children was based on children's education and applying certain tasks with them. They also engaged with official work in classrooms like preparing formal documents, attending school meetings and organising trips, etc.

On the other hand, the assistants of the teachers were responsible for work like cleaning the classroom, helping teachers in activities and helping children for daily necessities like using toilet, and eating lunch. However, their adult status is contradictory: while they can be an authority above children in the absence of the teacher, in the presence of the teacher their engagement with the above tasks puts them in a position where they cannot control or intervene with what the children do. Children's status is more important than that of the assistant of the teacher at that point because without educational qualifications they cannot be a part of the learning process. Therefore, children, not because of their children status but for their future role as educated citizens of the nation, come before the assistants in the hierarchy in the presence of teachers. In other words, assistants look after the classroom and children, which sets their place at the bottom of the hierarchy. But when the teacher is not in the classroom, the situation is not the same. Children are obliged to listen to the assistant because in the absence of teachers, education is not the main concern;

the main concern is about adults who need to be sure of the health and safety of the children. In other words, assistants' adult status changes the assistants' place in the hierarchy and the children's status moves to the bottom.

While this hierarchy was more negotiable in Nar, in Mavi these roles were more rigid. Teacher Fatma spent most of her time in the classroom dealing with the official tasks and her private issues; therefore, she tended to give more responsibility to Elif abla. The absences of teacher Fatma were unpredictable; therefore, teacher Fatma was not completely against Elif abla's interventions. I sometimes had to take responsibility for arranging the children's activities because of teacher Fatma's absence. For instance, one day, teacher Fatma called Elif abla to say she was late and Elif abla wanted me to do some activities to keep the children busy. I was concerned about leading an activity because this can influence my researcher role in the children's eyes. Hence I explained to the children that their teacher was late and then I asked for the children's ideas and suggestions to create an activity. In other words, I tried to involve children in the decision-making process in order not to be seen as a teacher. Most of the children were not comfortable with explaining their thoughts because they are not used to take part in choosing classroom activities; rather they are expected to follow teachers' instructions. Therefore, only some children became involved in this conversation. The children who were willing to explain their thoughts were 'professional pupils', which is the term Gordon, Holland and Lahelma (2000) use. Although they use this term for secondary school pupils, it is adaptable to preschoolers as well; thus I call these students 'professional preschoolers'. Basically, professional pupils know what appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is, what the limits of pupils' agency are, based on the school's regime of truths. Hence mostly only the professional preschoolers of Nar were involved in the decision-making

process when I asked for their views. In fact, professional students helped me to be not seen as a teacher because they were more willing to take the teacher role than I. However, the absence of teacher Fatma influenced my focus as a researcher and I felt extra responsibilities particularly when the children fought and harmed each other. Therefore when I was thinking about my research design, these situations influenced my decision to continue my research with Mavi.

In Mavi teacher Zehra was stricter about these roles because the classroom practices were very structured and everybody knew their positions well. For instance, when Sevgi abla tried to explain to a pupil called Nida how to draw, teacher Zehra immediately warned Sevgi abla by saying, ‘there is no need to say anything to Nida because she knows what she is doing’. In this comment, teacher Zehra sent a message to both Nida and Sevgi abla about their roles. This approach of teacher Zehra gives more power to the children and lessens the power of Sevgi abla’s adult status, which causes tension between the children and Sevgi abla when teacher Zehra is absent. Compared to Nar, teacher Zehra’s absences were predictable with 10-minute breaks two times a day. Therefore, both the children and Sevgi abla knew how their roles changed during these periods. Most of the time the children did not listen to Sevgi abla in these break times and they argued with her. Put more clearly, teacher Zehra gave more importance to be educated than to being adult and the children were aware of their powerful position in their teacher’s eyes.

3.7.1.2 Me in the Hierarchy

Teacher Zehra’s prioritising the children’s educational status and not Sevgi abla’s adult status is very cultural because education is highly valued in Turkey. Age hierarchy is also very important culturally; it is commonly expected that younger

people should respect older people. However, it is safe to say that in the school context, age hierarchy issues come after educational status importance. Undoubtedly, these cultural assumptions influenced the way teachers saw me and my researcher role. Both teachers tended to see me as an adult educated abroad. They tended to place me at the top of the hierarchy because I was doing a PhD abroad. When I was at the top of the hierarchy, the teachers expected me to share my knowledge with them. Especially if there was a problem that the teacher could not solve, my opinions were asked initially. Also, most of the time, the teachers tried to please me or waited for my approval of their comments and actions. I tried to avoid making comments, especially when the issue was directly related to children because I did not want to be in solidarity with the teachers. On the other hand, sometimes I was placed just after the teachers in the hierarchy because I did not have any teaching experiences as they had. Then they wanted to share their experiences with me. I sometimes found myself in situations where the teachers told me what I needed to do for building a relationship with the children. Mostly I did not refuse the teachers' suggestions and the duties they offered; however, I avoided doing duties like checking children's work because this kind of work can cause children to see me as a teacher. Hence, when I was offered this kind of duties, I tried to explain that I was busy with another task. Although this strategy worked in Nar because classroom activities were not structured, it did not work in Mavi because I was not allowed to engage with the children except in free play times. Therefore, I accepted some duties to engage with the children rather than refusing teacher Zehra.

The teachers' approach influenced my relationship with the children: while I tried to behave as an 'unusual adult', the teachers tried to portray me as a usual adult. For instance, teacher Zehra introduced me as 'teacher Nehir' to the children but I tried to

correct her by saying that I was not a teacher, so they could call me Nehir abla or Nehir. However, she continued to call me ‘teacher Nehir’; therefore, some children called me ‘teacher Nehir’ and I was reminded that I was not a teacher. Language is an important tool to shape relationships and in this case, one word - ‘teacher’ - that teacher Zehra used confused some children in the way they saw me. As a consequence, some children felt it necessary to call me ‘teacher’ because of their teacher in Mavi, but in Nar the children were clearer about my role, as I overheard the conversation between a pupil called Yağmur and her father when they saw me on the way to the school. She said to him: ‘Look dad, this is Nehir abla. (after a pause) She is not like Elif abla, but she comes to class every day.’

Given these complex relationships, listening was one of the important strategies in participant observation to gather data (Rinaldi, 2006; Davies, 2014). The researcher may want to hear what is relevant to his or her research focus and this leads him or her to misinterpret the research subjects’ views. A couple of times I found myself in situations where I was tracing something relevant to my focus or making comments to the children’s conversation through my subject. At this point, it is necessary to think about documenting the classroom observation. Jones et al. (2010) point out that documenting ‘what I am seeing’ is not merely writing what is occurring; it is more about the observer’s eye and his or her interpretations:

Observation notes are no more ‘innocent’ than any other texts therefore: they are invested with power, desire, subjectivity and writing’s fraught relation to reality. (Jones et al., 2010:481)

Hence as a researcher my subjectivity and identity as a Turkish white woman in her late 20s who has studied early years education has an influence on ‘how I wrote what

I saw'. Jones et al. (2010:489) claim that it is not possible to be certain about what happened and how the researcher writes it down, but the complexity of writing down observation 'becomes a resource for releasing difficult questions that recognize the complexity and the opacity of culture'.

I used a notebook when collecting observations in the classroom and this drew the attention of children and teachers. Some children asked me what I was writing and why I was taking notes. Although I told the children that I was writing about them and their interests, some of them felt uncomfortable that I was assessing their behaviour. For instance, a pupil called Arif from Mavi came one time to say to me that his friends were annoying him and he wanted me to write this down. Thorne (1993:17) was asked similar questions during her fieldwork and her responses such as 'I am writing down what you are doing' and 'I am interested in the behaviour of children' were interpreted by the children in a defensive way. She realised that words like 'doing' and 'behaving' cause these defensive responses because these kinds of words recall adults' control in children. On the other hand, the teachers had similar concerns and they were curious about my notes. Despite trying to give basic explanations about what I was writing to respond to their curiosity, most of the time I did not feel comfortable during note-taking because of the teachers' and some children's sceptical eyes. Consequently, I could not take long notes and I used abbreviations to write quickly without getting too much attention.

3.7.2 Interviews

While participant observation was the main method for this research, the interviews helped me to hear the participants' views individually. Interviews were conducted with the children, the teachers, the head teachers and the assistants of head teachers

(see Appendix 2). At the time of the interviews, I explained to each participant about the research, told them they could withdraw from the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable. None of the participants withdrew, but Umut from Nar did not want to continue his interview after a while because he said he was bored. We continued his interview a couple of days later when he felt he wanted to continue. I also assured participants that all information they gave would be confidential and all names would be changed.

I used voice recording in all interviews because it gave me the chance to hear the conversations more than one time, but it was also a good technique for me since I am not confident in note-keeping. All participants agreed to the recording, except the head teacher and the assistant head teacher of Nar. In the Turkish context, voice recording can make some participants uncomfortable because they are afraid to be heard by authorities. The head teacher Mr. İsmail stated that he did not feel comfortable when his voice was recorded, but he did not want to make the reason of this discomfort explicit. On the other hand, Mr. Cemal, the assistant head teacher in Nar, explained without hesitating that he would not like to hear his voice recording from YouTube as this happens to many people in Turkey. The children were happy with the recording and it was a good tool to start the conversation with some of them.

In order to reveal the research participants' meaning (Peters & Kelly, 2011) in interviews, the relation between the interviewee and interviewer needs to be considered because power relations influence the questions asked and the answers given. First of all, participants are expected to understand what the researcher aims to learn from the interview. Irwin and Johnson (2005) point out that young children may not comprehend the aim of the interview; however, the responsibility of the

researcher is to build a relationship with the child. It is necessary to point that not just young children but also adults may not fully understand what the researcher aims to learn from the interview; therefore as a researcher I tried to build a relationship with both adults and children.

Building a relationship was not about just spending time together, it was also about knowing and accepting each other. It is difficult to say that I built the same relationship with each participant of this research; while some of the research participants and spoke or played with me more than others, with some I could not share similar experiences. However, this does not mean that I valued the views of some more than those of others; it means that the relationship between individuals differs. For instance, a pupil called Tolga did not like to talk much and was mainly known as ‘quiet boy’ in Mavi; I did not force him to talk with me just because I wanted to learn from him. I accepted that he did not like to share his thoughts as some of his friends did. I realized that when I did not force the children and adults in my study to build a relationship in a certain way, they seemed to feel freer to express their thoughts in their own ways. Also, I accepted that I could learn from each individual unless they wanted to. In this case, Tolga came to me and he started to talk with me about his home life; then we started to share something. In his interview, he was willing to tell me about himself; teacher Zehra showed her surprise after I had interviewed him for about twenty minutes, saying that she had expected the interview to take less than five minutes.

The position of researcher as the initiator of the research process puts the interviewer in a more powerful situation than the interviewee in some contexts. Due to the hierarchical structure of the school context and the way participants saw me as a

professional and adult, I was seen as the one who had the right answers. Hence most of the participants felt that their words should satisfy me; for instance, while some watched my reactions and tried to change their answers according to my facial expressions, some asked whether they had given right or wrong answers (Irwin & Johnson, 2005). Although I emphasised that there were no right answers, some preferred to find the right answer by asking me or changing what they had said rather than exploring their own views.

3.7.2.1 Interviews with Schools' Staff

I interviewed teacher Zehra once in the teachers' room of the school and once in the classroom while the children had drama class and teacher Fatma in the extended room of her classroom. The interviews were arranged so that they took place in the free time of the teachers. I interviewed the teachers twice (see Table 3.2) to discuss gender identities and national identities separately. I structured my interview questions around three topics: teachers' views on (1) the representations of gender/nationalism in the Turkish education system, (2) their own perspectives and practices in relation to gender/nationalism, (3) children's engagements with gender/national discourses. Although I structured my interview questions in this way, the questions were open-ended and I did not ask the questions in order, but rather based on the flow of the conversation (see Appendix 4). The teachers also shaped the conversation so that most of the time there was no need to ask some of the questions, as they had already given their answers to them.

I conducted interviews with the head teachers and the assistant head teachers in their private rooms in the schools. The interviews with the head teachers and assistant of head teachers were more about the Turkish education system and the expectations of

this system from students and particularly preschoolers in terms of gender and national identities (see Appendix 5). I did not interview the assistants of the teachers because both stated that they did not want to be ‘questioned’ but felt better talking to me in daily conversation. I think their uncomfortable feeling about interviews is based on two reasons: one is their educational status and the other is about their responsibilities. Elif abla from Nar stated that she did not have a good education; therefore, I should not spend time to hear her thoughts. Although I tried to explain that she was part of the classroom and that she engaged with the children and was therefore important for my research, she did not want any formal conversation. Similarly, Sevgi abla from Mavi told me that there was no need to interview her, that I could ask her questions whenever I wanted. Both also claimed that they had responsibilities in the classrooms; therefore, they could not leave the classrooms. As they worked from 7am to 5.30pm, I did not want to take their spare time, but I talked with them in the lunch breaks and during their spare times in the classroom.

Table 3.2 Interviews

Interview type	Nar	Mavi
semi-structured interviews	teacher Fatma (2 times) HT İsmail HTA Cemal	teacher Zehra (2 times) HT Ahmet HTA Deniz
interviews with task based technique	22 children	25 children

3.7.2.2 Interviews with the Children

The teachers and I decided the location and time of the children’s interviews because of limited space and time. Undoubtedly, this influenced children thinking of me as an

adult who knows the right answers. To deal with this concern, I used the task based technique in the interviews with the children. I used a box with some materials like toys, a Turkish flag, and the pictures of Atatürk that initiated the conversation. I asked stimulus questions in relation to the materials to start the conversation such as what does this toy remind you of? Do you know the person in the picture? Do you have babies or cars in your home? As some scholars point out, not all children enjoy the task based technique in research (Harden et al., 2000; Irwin & Johnson, 2005). Some children were very outspoken and did not engage with the materials only with the conversation. However, some of them did not engage either with my questions or with the materials. Therefore, it was difficult to learn from all children with the same technique because children's character influenced the methods used (Aubrey & Dahl, 2005).

Lappalainen (2009) interviewed children in pairs in her study; in order to deal with unequal power relations between adults and children she offered children to bring one or two friends. However, based on my pilot study and observations, I understood that the power relations between children also influence them expressing their thoughts. The competitive nature of classroom activities cause children to correct each other. Therefore, for this study to avoid multiple power relations I preferred to interview the children one to one. Rather than me choosing a few children, all the children were included in this study to avoid the possible negative feeling of exclusion. This may not allow the researcher to engage with some children deeply, but due to this study prioritising children's well-being, I preferred to include all the children in the classrooms. However, this brought another problem: I started to have similar conversations because the children had talked with each other about the materials and what they had talked about with me in the interviews. Therefore I tried

to change the materials; for instance, in one interview I used the Turkish flag, in another one a picture that included the Turkish flag.

3.7.3 Document Analysis

This study is keen to learn how gender and national identities manifest themselves in policy documents. The documents that are used in schools have political meanings and hidden messages in order to spread the state's ideology (Apple, 1979). The expectations of official bodies can be read from guidelines, textbooks and programmes of schools. However, rather than merely showing what these texts claim, how they are interpreted and used by teachers and children is more important for this study. Despite serving as a base to understand MoNE's approach to gender and national identities, the discourse of these texts does not construct identities without the influence of subjectivities and power relations that occur in the classroom settings (Durrani & Dunne, 2010).

On the website of MoNE's Early Years Education Department, there are documents that teachers were offered to use in their classroom practices for the 2013/2014 school term. I chose Early Childhood Education Programme (ECEP) (2013) and Early Years Activity Book (EYAB) (2013a). I chose ECEP and EYAB documents because they are the core documents for early childhood institutions. Both teachers engaged with both ECEP (2013) and EYAB (2013a); therefore, they were the main documents that were analysed in this research. Moreover, I engaged with some regulation documents of MoNE: the regulation of Early Years Education and Primary Schools and the regulation of Flag and National Ceremonies.

According to MoNE, preschool teachers have to prepare plans by using mainly ECEP and EYAB. Teachers create their own plans by combining different activities

according to developmental stages; however, most teachers use pre-prepared plans that can be found on the internet. Teacher Fatma said she downloaded different plans every year and kept them in case an inspector comes and wants to see them, but in actual practice she said she relied on her 'twenty years' experience that was all in her mind'. Teacher Zehra also used plans from the internet and followed these plans in her practices. She said she made changes and arrangements to these plans; therefore, she did not want to share her whole plan book with me when I asked for a copy. Because she 'made an effort to create this plan', she did not want anyone else to use it. It was like a recipe book for her and she did not want to share her recipes. Therefore, I did not have a chance to analyse both teachers' personal plans as documents. On the other hand, teacher Zehra shared her classroom file with me, which included a children's reading and writing practice book, children's developmental maps, minutes from parents' meetings and plans for annual trips

3.8 Data Gathering Period

The data gathering process is not a straightforward process because depending on gathered data it can last longer or be shorter. However, I needed to arrange my comings and goings in a planned way because my sponsorship did not provide a UK salary if I stay in Turkey for more than two months. Therefore, I tried to keep my visits to Turkey to less than two months. Consequently, for the fieldwork I travelled to Turkey three times, which influenced the cost and time that I spent for the fieldwork. These practical concerns contradicted the nature of qualitative study because the data collection process was shaped more by these practical concerns rather than by the data.

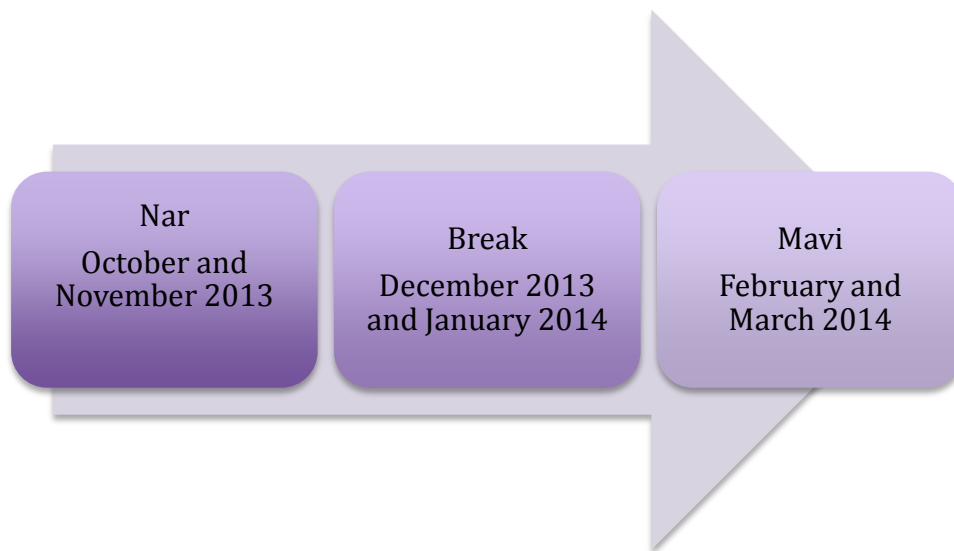


Figure 3.3: Data gathering period¹⁶

The fieldwork was conducted first in Nar. Then I came back to the UK for the above reasons. I stayed nearly two months in the UK because the schools were on holiday at that time. Having a break between the two classrooms gave me the chance to read and think about my gathered data and decide on the next part of my fieldwork. After this period I went back to Turkey to conduct my last part of fieldwork in Mavi. While I spent approximately five weeks in each classroom, I spent one extra month to access the schools and gather consent. Observation of each classroom lasted five weeks and covered the whole day, except for Mavi's extra chess and drama classes. The first weeks helped me to build a relationship with the participants; therefore, I started to conduct the interviews in the last two weeks. I also gathered relevant documents during the fieldwork.

3.9 Analysis of Data

The data analysis process consists of different stages, including transcribing, finding concepts, coding and writing all the data down in a structured way (Cohen et al.,

¹⁶These periods include access and consent processes.

2011). As data I had the interviews with the children, the two teachers, the two head teachers and the two assistant head teachers, 10 weeks of classroom observation, some policy documents, informal conversations with the children, the teachers and the assistants of the teachers. In the data analysis process, all data are approached as discourse to see how knowledge, subjectivities and power relations appear in actions like conversations, writings and body language (Blaise, 2005). Undoubtedly, the data are given shape by my own subjectivities; however, it is not a one-way process because data are not static and fixed. Also the data influence my ways of seeing and interpreting them.

In order to understand the realities of the research participants, firstly I transcribed all the interviews in Turkish by listening to the voice recordings. Then I printed out all the data (interview transcriptions, observations, field notes and documents) and read through all the textual material. I used two big concepts: gender and nationalism. These two headlines were categorised as children and school parts in relation to the research questions: how children construct gender/national identities and how gender and national identities are presented in early years policies and practices. In the light of these core codes I started to create sub-codes such as teachers' perspectives on gender, children's perspectives on gender separation and children's views on Atatürk Nationalism. During this process my research themes became clear and they structured the writing process. Re-reading the data and the literature that discusses similar research themes led to the emergence of new key themes several times. Reading data many times allowed me to engage with the data closely. In the writing process, as transcribing twice - first transcribing the Turkish, then translate from Turkish to English - takes a great amount of time, I only translated relevant parts of my data into English.

There are two important issues that need to be raised in relation to the data analysis process: one is translating language and the other is choosing relevant parts of the data. Translation from one language to another is not a technical process only, it also involves translating social and cultural meanings because words can mean different things in different contexts. Therefore, I first transcribed my interviews in Turkish because this allowed me to understand the research participants' meanings. The challenging part was translating these meanings to a different language and culture. Also, some words and concepts are not translatable such as 'Abla', a word that I use without translation. Therefore, it is important to explain the context to give cultural meanings (Temple & Young, 2004). The second point about choosing relevant data is related to the whole data analysis process. Mostly the researcher is the one who decides which information can be used as data (Cohen et al., 2011). Despite the researcher aiming to understand 'what participants' meanings are', the researcher's subjectivity and relation with participants influence the way data are analysed. As MacLure (2003:17) puts it in a clearer statement: 'We cannot relate to things as if we were dead. We bring our own hopes, fears and expectations to the places and objects of our research.'

3.10 Reflexivity

As stated above, researchers bring their values to their research; therefore, it is important to understand how their values and understandings influence the research process. Davis (1998) asserts that there are two cultures (the culture of the participants and the culture of the researcher) in the research process. The interaction between these cultures is used as a tool in creating data. She adds that the

researcher's culture has two parts in itself: academic based experiences and non-academic based life experiences. Davis (1998:331-332) states that:

researchers when being reflexive can become aware of both their academic preconceptions and their cultural prejudices. They may recognise that there are two voices at work in their head and there may be many different cultural voices amongst the people they study.

It is important to listen to these voices to be aware of the interaction of cultures that take place in research. In this case, I need to reflect on my position to reveal how I listened to my participants and observed research settings and also how their interaction with me influenced the research process. Although I mentioned earlier my position in relation to the research participants, especially in the participant observation part, I would like to extend this issue by explaining these relations in a detailed way.

I was born in Turkey and raised in different cities. I have a long history with the Turkish education system: I studied in the state institutions of MoNE from preschool to bachelor's degree between 1991 and 2008. Then I had a scholarship from MoNE in 2009 to study for a Master's and PhD degree abroad. Despite spending most of my life in Ankara, where I conducted my research, I have been living in the UK for the last five years. This gives me a chance to see my culture and experiences from outside of Turkey in a critical way. I sometimes found myself in the middle of two cultures: Turkey is the place that has emotional attachments, boundaries of being a woman and being critical. The UK is the place which liberates my ideas and thoughts. For example, I asked provocative questions the head teacher of Mavi about women's disadvantaged status in Turkey when he tried to normalise women's status

in Turkey. On the other hand, I was silent on some unprofessional practices that I witnessed because I know [it is normal] these can happen in Turkey.

I still expected to see new approaches and some changes in the Turkish education system. I had a chance to compare my experiences with today's schooling. Not just because I was part of the system for many years, I also had a chance to compare my experience in Nar's primary school because I studied my lower secondary school education between 1997-1999. I was one of the first graduates of this school. I was surprised when I visited the school for the first time to conduct my research that not much had changed after 15 years in terms of the physical appearance of the school. I did not know anybody else in the school except two teachers but everything seemed very familiar to me. After entering Nar, I realised that the Turkish education system has not been changed a lot not just physically also in terms of its practices.

How my research participants saw me was closely related to my above history but also to their assumptions and prejudices. I generally introduced myself to my gatekeepers as a PhD student who researches children and early childhood education. They tended to see me as an intern; however, after further explanations about my study abroad, they could not clarify my position quickly and this confusion brought other issues. The teachers, their assistants and the head teachers and assistant of head teachers did not have much experience of hosting a researcher in their setting who is from Turkey and studying in the United Kingdom. My educational status was praised but I would not be seen as someone who has the knowledge to judge their educational practices. For instance, I heard statements like 'You know these issues better', 'I know things are different abroad' or 'Can you give advice with this issue?' This was a challenge because rather than giving their own perspectives, they tried to

give ideal answers to convince me they are aware of ‘what is right’. On the other hand, some of the children tended to liken me to their elder siblings or cousins. When I said ‘I am studying at university’, they talked about the people they knew who also studied at universities. I also have a niece, cousins’ and friends’ children in my life who I can talk with about cartoons, films they like to watch or the places they like around the city. These connections opened a space for the children and me to share some commonalities from our lives. Also my physical appearance as a small and young woman sometimes helped me to enter the children’s world. I could enter their small tents or run and dance with them without changing my body posture.

3.11 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations in research are important during all stages of the research process. I was asked to fill in an ethical approval form by the Institute of Education at the University of Warwick before conducting my research. In this section I mainly discuss the issues are mentioned in this form. First of all I would like to discuss the issues related to the following ethical guidelines. Ethical guides of committees like BERA (British Educational Research Association) for educational studies in the UK aim to argue ethical problems the researcher can be confronted with. While these guidelines raise the ethical awareness of researchers, their prescriptive rules carry the danger that the researcher dismisses being reflexive in particular research contexts. Bauman (1995) points out that these kinds of guidelines lessen personal responsibilities by determined rules:

Once we stop trusting our own judgments, we grow susceptible to the fear of being in the wrong...we feel the need of the helpful hand of the expert to fetch us back into the comfort of certainty. (Bauman, 1995:12)

Some scholars argue that by accepting ethic committees' useful suggestions for considering ethical issues, it is difficult to discuss ethical issues because there are complexities rather than fixed and determined rules (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Mortari & Harcourt, 2012). Also their universal approach can sometimes clash with local differences. For instance, according to BERA (2011:5), 'Educational research undertaken by UK researchers outside of the UK must adhere to the same ethical standards as research in the UK'. Based on this principle I am supposed to engage with ethical and moral issues in Turkey with UK based ethical standards. Although this claim gives 'the comfort of certainty', there is the possibility of dismissing different ethical and moral understandings in the Turkish context. Working reflexively is important for considering diverse ethical practices at this point but Christensen and Prout (2002) claim that this understanding can lead to problems as well because too much reliance on the researcher's experience and skills causes researcher subjectivity which is central to ethical practices. Therefore they point to the necessity of combining these two views:

The aim should be to develop a set of strategic ethical values that can give researchers the flexibility to meet the very varied circumstances of research that they may encounter while also providing an anchor for their practice.

(Christensen & Prout, 2002:495)

In addition, rather than taking one fixed ethical position, I was open to move between plural positions based on Lee's (1998:475) 'ethics of motion', which 'goes against the notion that one achieves ethical adequacy in the moment when one discovers where one stands'. In addition, this research supports the idea that the ethical

considerations do not differ in terms of adult-child status rather than their social positions as the two statements below claim:

There is no simple formula to persuade us that research with children always carries a greater ethical burden than any other. The main ethical issues should not revolve around children's innate difference but relate to children's social location as subordinate to adults. (Harden et al., 2000:2)

Christensen and Prout use the 'ethical symmetry' term to discuss ethical consideration about research with children:

...researchers do not have to use particular methods or, indeed, work with a different set of ethical standards when working with children. Rather it means that the practices employed in the research have to be in line with children's experiences, interests, values and everyday routines. (2002:482)

Informed consent deserves attention as a significant element of ethics. This refers to informing the participants about the purpose of the study and being sure that they understand that they are voluntary participants (Silverman, 2005). The British Educational Research Association states the following:

Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported. (BERA, 2011:5)

In respect of the above debates, now I would like to discuss informed consent, confidentiality and safe-guarding issues. Harden et al. (2000) point out that informed

consent is problematic because children's participation in research depends on adult gatekeepers. Also, in a school context, children may feel an obligation to participate because they follow compulsory tasks as discussed earlier (Morrow & Richards, 1996). I would like to add that some adults can also feel obligations to participate due to their close engagement with the rules and regulations of official institutions. For instance, the permission letter from MoNE was the main condition for the head teachers to accept me in their schools. Then the head teachers and assistant of head teachers influenced the teachers' decisions since they were in a higher position than teachers. In Mavi the assistant of the head teacher introduced me to teacher Zehra by saying 'our school will host Miss Nehir for a while and she will conduct research in your classroom'. Undoubtedly, this statement played a part in the decision of teacher Zehra. It is fair to say that rather than all participants understanding fully what research is about and the importance of their participation, it is necessary to add that some participants give consent because they are in situations where obligations, rules and regulations direct their practices.

As another important ethical concern, the names of all individuals and places are pseudonyms in this research to protect anonymity and confidentiality of research participants. It has been highlighted that researchers need to think about the limits of confidentiality (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Kirk, 2007). Which circumstances can break the confidentiality should be clarified to research participants. Williamson et al. (2005) discuss whether children need to be informed about these limitations or not. They point that children are not informed about the confidentiality in everyday lives, rather teachers or parents carry responsibilities to observe child protection concerns. Therefore, when they are informed about in what situations what they say can be shared with somebody else, they can get confused and this can increase their

anxiety and sensitivity. Williamson et al. (2005) preferred to explain this limitation verbally rather than in written form to 9-11-year-olds in their study. Due to similar concerns and due to the children in this study could not read yet, all research participants were informed verbally about the limitation of confidentiality, which is closely related to safeguarding research participants.

To be sure about participants' well-being it is necessary to engage with the culture of the researched closely because the definition of well-being can be differed. In some countries child protection laws may not be very strong; therefore, there may not be any authorities to report problematic situations to. For instance, physical punishment can be seen as a part of the teaching process in some cultures; however, if a researcher comes from a country where physical punishment is strictly banned, it would not be easy to deal with this kind of concern. Therefore, it is important that researchers think about which actions they can take or cannot take, to be sure about the well-being of research participants. My history with the research environment allowed me to read cultural differences and the understandings of well-being of my participants. My interventions were shaped by the authorities' approach to safeguarding rather than my personal ideas only.

3.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed why qualitative research was chosen for this study by explaining the issues that influence the process of designing research. Then the design of this research was introduced based on the pilot study conducted in Nar. After presenting the period of access to Nar and Mavi and how the consent of research subjects was gathered, I provided a detailed description and justification of the methods used when carrying out my research in these settings. I also gave details

of the periods when I gathered the data in both preschool classrooms and how I analysed these data by explaining transcribing, translation and coding processes. This was followed by a reflexivity section that argued my understandings, personal character and the ways my research participants saw me. In the last section ethical issues were discussed in terms of ethical standards, my ethical position, informed consent, confidentiality and participants' well-being.

Chapter 4

Gender Identities

4.1 Introduction

Having presented the contextual background and methodology of this study, in this part I will present the data on gender identities. In the first section I will briefly introduce some key studies that will help me to discuss all of these findings. Then I will present the construction of the girl and boy categories in Nar and Mavi by focusing on the ideas and approaches of four actors of gender identities in the schools: head teachers and assistant of head teachers, teachers, teacher assistants, and preschool programmes and settings. Then, how these two categories were constructed by the children will be presented by focusing on children seeing girls and boys as opposites and as different categories. What brings girls and boys together in these preschool classrooms will also be discussed. In the last section I will present the difficulties in staying within, or crossing, gender boundaries by examining the power relations between girls and boys. It will be argued that while some children suffer from hegemonic masculinity in their attempts to cross, other ways of being are possible for some children in the safe arms of hegemonic masculinity.

Prior to presenting the data I would like to point out that my gender identity was influential in researching children's gender identities. Blaise (2005:106) claims that adult-child and teacher-student relationships are not neutral; they are part of gendered power relations. She realised in her study that she was part of dominant heterosexual discourses. As with Blaise (2005), I found that my femaleness was influential in my relations with the children. However, my adult (researcher) status

came prior to any other gender role. Therefore, I was able to be part of both girl and boy play groups. I am certain that some of the girls believed that I was in their category. The girls involved me in their play and they talked to me about aspects of my appearance such as my earrings, hair and clothes. We shared our knowledge about beauty, make-up and dressing up. It was like we had commonalities about our visual appearances that brought us together under female category. On the other hand, like the girls, the boys invited me to take part in their play. It was clear that the boys wanted to share their play with me. However, due to both categories wanting to play with me, sometimes competition between them occurred. When I was involved in homecorner play, the boys came and told me that I always played with the girls and the same thing happened when I played with the boys. In relation to that point, I was kind of part of gender integration on some occasions because sometimes a boy really wanted to play with me and he would try to be involved in the girls' play and vice versa. This finding reveals that my gender position and a girl's gender position as a female were not the same in the children's eyes because mostly the children did not like to involve someone from the other category in their play. This will be detailed later. However, due to my presence both categories mostly accepted each other. However, it also needs to be stated that the competition between the boys and girls for my participation in their games was closely related to my role as a researcher.

4.2 Constructing gender identities in Nar and Mavi

From the first day to the end of my field study, I had to recognise that there are two distinct groups in the preschool settings: girls and boys. Before the children arrive, empty classrooms give few clues about gender separation by gender stereotypical

toys and pink and blue hearts on the pictures drawn by girls and boys, but as soon as the children arrive, the separation starts to reveal itself more specifically by separated girls' and boys' groups sitting around tables or playing in different areas. However, these are the visible representations of gender separation. In fact, there are other boundaries that divide boys and girls. There are also invisible boundaries between two categories and the children know where these two categories' territories start and end, which games and roles they can(not) play and which materials (do not) belong to their categories. Visible and invisible boundaries are created and recreated by all the actors involved: children, teachers, head teachers and assistant of head teachers , assistants, space and materials. I included all the actors' roles in the gender separation because, as Thorne (1993) points out, gender separation is a complex process and not just authorities but also individuals create and recreate gender separation. Hence Thorne (1993) uses the term 'gender separation' instead of 'sex segregation' because 'sex segregation' reminds of the responsibility of legal authorities for separation. However, not just authorities but also children and other actors like teachers reproduce gender separation by labelling plays, areas and materials as girl and boy.

Gender separation between girls and boys is closely related to the construction of identities through the male/female binary. I found that the children in this study constructed their gender identities in relation to the girl/boy dichotomy. At this point I use Connell's 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasised femininity' concepts. Connell (1987) adapts Gramsci's hegemony term to explain how a specific form of masculinity exerts power over other masculinities and women. According to Connell (1987), hegemonic masculinity subordinates other forms of masculinities and women but not by eliminating them because its existence is closely bound up with their

interrelated relations. The public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support (Connell, 1987:185). In other words, hegemonic masculinity is not the property of every male, only of some. According to Connell (1987:186), one of the important elements of hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual and all relations with other forms of masculinities and femininities are constructed through the subordination of women and men. At this point, Connell (1987:187) introduces ‘emphasised femininity’, which as with hegemonic masculinity, emphasised femininity is culturally constructed and it is particularly related to the domestic sphere (of the home) (Connell, 1987). Blaise (2005) points out that some might say there should be hegemonic femininity if there is hegemonic masculinity. However, Connell (1987:187) claims that ‘there is no femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men’. Similarly Blaise (2005) found that children position themselves as girls and boys to maintain gendered relations. Blaise (2005) claims that using Connell’s concepts is useful to understand these relations in preschool settings:

by locating hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity in the early childhood classroom, it becomes possible to see how they maintain practices that institutionalise men’s dominance over women, therefore sustaining the current gendered social order. (ibid:59)

Similar to the two forms, hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, Francis (1998) suggests two positions—‘sensible-selfless’ and ‘silly-selfish’—that children perform in the primary school context. While the sensible-selfless position as a hegemonic form of femininity is performed by girls, boys perform a ‘silly-selfish’

position as a form of hegemonic masculinity in the primary school context. As discussed in the literature review chapter, traits like being mature and obedient position girls as sensible and selfless. This position mostly disempowers girls in the gender relations because they need to tolerate boys' silly-selfish behaviours (Francis, 1998). Boys are tolerated to be silly, messy and naughty and these traits mostly empower them because they use these traits to achieve their demands.

Francis (1998) points out that children do not perform these positions constantly and they sometimes resist and cross boundaries between the two positions but mostly the genders are divided as oppositional. Consequently, as two different cultures, girls and boys try to play their roles as their category requires and they construct their gender identities through category maintenance. This study also found that the children were concerned with fulfilling the roles that their categories require them to play. Hence, gender boundaries are protected by *category-maintenance work* (Davies, 2003) and they construct their gender identities through this maintenance work. However, it was observed that the children attempted to cross these boundaries by going beyond the male/female binary. In addition, the children's statements revealed that category maintenance is stronger inside the classroom than outside the school. This shows that there may be more pressure on children to stay in the boundaries in preschool settings than in other contexts. In the following part, I will present the influence of preschool settings in the children's construction of gender identities through staff, policies and practices.

4.2.1 The head teachers and assistant of head teachers

In this section I will compare the ideas and understandings of head teachers and assistant of head teachers about gender in school context. While the head teachers and

assistant of head teachers of Mavi were more open to discussing how the school plays a part in children's gender identities, the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Nar did not feel any necessity to talk about this issue in detail. When I asked how gender identities are given in the Turkish education system, the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Nar were very clear about the gender neutral approach of schools. HT Mr. Ahmet thought that girls and boys are like two halves of an apple and they are seen as the same in the education system. HTA Mr. Cemal stated that Turkey has overcome gender inequality issues and there is no difference between girls and boys any more. It can be said that there is no need to discuss gender identities since boys and girls are equal. On the other hand, the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Mavi also talked about the gender neutral approach of the education system but they pointed out that the girl and boy categories are seen as gendered categories in Turkish society and this understanding is reproduced in schools. For instance, Mr. İsmail, HT of Mavi, emphasised that the education system does not make any gender separation but he also emphasised the importance of girls' education:

Nehir: What do you think about gender roles and how they take place in schools?

Mr. İsmail HT of Mavi: We never separate our children as a boy or a girl. Sometimes boys can do better, sometimes girls can do better [he means academic success here]. We do not have any concern to separate them. I want all girls to go to school and continue their studies because they will be mothers who bring up future children.

(from the interview, 7 March 2014)

Mr. İsmail felt it necessary to point out the importance of girls' education. However, this does not mean that the gender roles of girls and boys are the same since he sees girls as potential mothers who will raise children in the future. This is an important feature of emphasised femininity, which sees girls as responsible for caring for and looking after children (Connell, 1987). To put it in a different way, different expectations from girls and boys do not lead to any gender inequality in Mr. İsmail's view; rather they are the roles that girls and boys need to play. Mrs. Deniz, HTA of Mavi, also pointed out the gender neutral approach of policies but she also thought that gendered roles are given in schools and gender inequality is reproduced by practices. According to Mrs. Deniz, the roles were clearly defined in schools and she pointed out that boys learn to be fathers from their fathers and girls learn to be mothers from their mothers. Similar to Mr. İsmail, Mrs. Deniz explained how mother and father roles play a part in children's learning of gender roles in the extract below.

Nehir: What about gender roles and how they take place in schools?

Mrs. Deniz: In the paper, there does not seem to be any difference between girls and boys but practices tell us very well what women's and men's roles are in the society. It does not say you are equal in society. We have unchangeable examples: girl and mother go to the kitchen to prepare food, father and boy sit and watch television. Pictures in our books are like that. We use pictures a lot. Then child see pictures which present girl always with mother, boy always with father.

(from the interview, 5 March 2014)

From the head teacher and assistant of head teacher' viewpoints, it can be said that the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Nar did not see girls and boys as two different categories as they disregarded ongoing gender separation in the school. The head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Mavi were more aware of the expectations of the gender categories, which were defined through the mother and father roles. However, it is hard to explain the reflection of these ideas in the preschool classrooms directly. It can only be assumed that due to the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Mavi being stricter than the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Nar in applying MoNE rules and regulations, as discussed in the contextualisation chapter, the equality of girls and boys was given more importance in Mavi as there is a requirement for a gender neutral approach in the Turkish education system.

4.2.2 Teachers

As discussed in the literature review, Browne (2004) and MacNaughton (1998) found that many teachers believe that there are innate differences between boys and girls and this understanding justifies the gender separation that occurs in schools. This study also found that biological determinism takes place in teachers' understanding of boys and girls as two different categories. There were a number of incidents in which the teachers highlighted the biological differences between boys and girls. The extract below shows how teacher Zehra stated that nature was the reason for boys' behaviours:

Today the boys were excited with a toy which Engin brought to the class. This excitement turned the class into a chaotic and noisy place; however, teacher Zehra did not wait long to intervene in the situation. After her angry

warning, she needed to explain to me why she was angry. She explained that boys always have too much energy that it is in their nature; however, she sometimes cannot stand this. Despite not being happy with boys' nature, she tended to normalise their behaviour due to their given nature.

(from field diary in Mavi, 17 February 2014)

This normalisation also perpetuates the domination of boys in the usage of classrooms because of the acceptance of the aggressive and energetic nature of boys, as Walkerdine (1998) observed in her study. At this point, aggressive and violent features of hegemonic masculinity give power to boys to regulate and dominate classrooms (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992). However, teacher Zehra did not accept this power completely. She tried to intervene in the boys' domination by mixing girls' and boys' play. On the other hand, sometimes separation was used by her to prevent problems. There were two incidents in Mavi when teacher Zehra tried to provide 'safe' environments for both categories by changing Ceylin's group on the first occasion and changing Bahadır's group on the second one. In the first case Ceylin was the only girl in the boys' group and teacher Zehra changed her place because she could feel alone there. In the second one, Bahadır was the only boy in the girls' group and this time teacher Zehra thought that being in the same group with girls made Bahadır bored and he could disturb the group. What does seem clear is that girls and boys favoured gender separation in these examples.

Similarly, teacher Fatma thought innate behaviours are important in the construction of children' gender identities. For instance, one day she warned the boys to stay silent, and she told me that aggressiveness and their energy come from their genes. Teacher Fatma complained about boys' innate behaviours. She made comparisons

about the natural differences between boys and girls by criticising boys' nature and praising girls' nature. For instance, she mentioned that girls are naïve and responsible and she complained about how boys always disturb girls' play and make her tired during the free play time. However, teacher Fatma did not use any strategy to prevent boys' domination in the classroom as teacher Zehra did. Hence gender separation was dramatically visible in Nar. The first striking separation was the pink and blue division in the children's uniforms. When I talked with teacher Fatma about the pink and blue division of the children's uniforms, she said that she did not agree with this division but families wanted their children to wear pink and blue uniforms. Teacher Fatma gave responsibility to families rather than applying her thoughts to this decision here. Also the boys and girls most of the times sit separately during table activities and lunch times in Nar. This scene was similar during the free play time. Generally, the girls engaged with homecorner play in restricted space because the boys occupied the larger space in the classroom. Teacher Fatma was aware of the boundaries between the territories of girls and boys because she warned the boys not to pass to the girls' playing area several times.

On the other hand, in the interviews both teachers emphasised that boys and girls are equal in their views and that there is no difference between them in today's society. They also emphasised the importance of the socialisation process in children's learning of gender roles. Particularly families are the most important element in their view. When I asked teacher Fatma about biological differences in the interview, she stated the socialisation process is important in shaping children's understanding of gender behaviours.

Nehir: In the classroom, you have mentioned biological differences between girls and boys. Can you tell me more about it?

Teacher Fatma: For me boys and girls are equal; there are no differences for me. But of course there are differences...From Adam and Eva, the meanings of being men and women have been changing but women and men may be not physically the same but they have the same intelligence. Moreover, women have skill of doing multiple tasks and rational thinking but men cannot see details and small things.

Nehir: Because they are men?

Teacher Fatma: I think not because of that they are men but due to bringing style because the brain can be developed. When you teach a woman, she can see details but not men, it is because we (she referred women here) bring up men as lazy. Unfortunately, mothers do everything for men in Turkey. We do not let them think, do their jobs, improve themselves because we already make everything for them. So of course children see what their mothers and fathers do and learn from them. As in the home, girls and boys engage with different tasks in the classroom like girls play with babies and boys play war games, etc.

(from the interview, 25 October 2013)

In this quotation teacher Fatma mentioned that men and women have become more similar but at the same time she exemplified different skills that are attached to women and men. She thought these differences are based on traditional roles of women and men in society. In different occasions, she talked the same issue; when a

boy called Can did not help to clean the class, she said Can's mother always did everything for him therefore he did not want to clean the class. Can's mother emphasised femininity role gives power to Can in classroom settings and teacher Fatma complained about this reflection to the classroom. According to her, children already learn about gendered roles from their families:

Nehir: Do you think early years' curriculum and practices are important in children's construction of gender identity?

Teacher Fatma: In fact the identities are already constructed at the home and children come to school with these identities because 6 years is late for preschool. Therefore, we could not make changes but we can only correct it a bit. You know in the Turkish family structure man role is very little, women are responsible for doing many things like looking after home and children. We try to change this process and correct it a bit but we could not be very successful because a child sees the father's role in the home and then thinks all men are same. Girls see mothers always work in the home. When you ask a child what the mother' role is they say cooking, washing clothes, ironing, cleaning, even for working mothers. But when you talked about father's role, they say sitting, watching television.

(from the interview, 25 October 2013)

Similar to teacher Fatma, teacher Zehra thought that there are no specific gender roles in today's society and men and women do similar things. However, after saying this in her interview, she added that this was her personal view because teacher Zehra found families responsible for children's construction of gender identities. She

stated that she emphasised equal roles of men and women in her practices but she thought that the family's role is more important.

Nehir: In your opinion, how can gender roles be represented in curriculum and practices?

Teacher Zehra: Children should learn their gender role by experiencing them. Firstly, these things are happening in their families. For instance, I brought up two children and we know that they should have a bath with opposite sex of parents¹⁷. I applied to this my children but when I suggested this practice to children's parents, some parents reacted negatively. They said this can be weird and a child can be influenced bad. But based on my knowledge, I try to do what I know. But this is the way of living and this depends on economic, social and cultural background.

Nehir: What is the role of the school then?

Teacher Zehra: You know preschool classes are places where children from different families are gathered and we aim to give equal education to them. The main point is to try to not exclude children. I think sex education by families is more reasonable. Here in class Arif wants to be father or Ahmet wants to play in homecorner, some want to help cooking... They see these roles at home.

...

Nehir: Do you think, that children know about being male and female?

¹⁷This is not a Turkish practice; rather teacher Zehra thinks that it is a good practice to teach sex roles to children.

Teacher Zehra: They are mirrors of families. I do not know if it is true or not but children do what they see and observe from their families. I brought up two children and they are not the same as us one hundred per cent, but they can think further than us but they think and act similarly. Foundation is family.

(from the interview, 10 March 2014)

There were a number of incidents in both classrooms that suggest women and men's roles are given through father and mother roles. Sometimes traditional gender roles were reproduced by both teachers. For instance, teacher Zehra on a few occasions warned the children to finish all their food at lunch time because their mothers spend time and put a lot of effort to prepare the food. Teacher Fatma used the same issue as a weapon to encourage the children to eat. Most of the time if there was an issue about children's food or clothes, mothers are seen as responsible. For instance, if a child forgets their lunch box or if children swap accidentally their jumpers, the first person who are called are mothers. If there is an issue about money like monthly school fees, or buying new materials like paper, etc., fathers are prominent in the conversations. For instance, in Nar, it was decided to buy a new projection machine, therefore, the money was gathered from the parents. During money gathering, I heard that teacher Fatma asked a child whose parents did not make a payment, where the child's father was because the father works occasionally in different cities and she wanted to learn whether he was away or not. It was not surprising to hear teacher Fatma's curiosity because there is a clear distinction between the roles of mother and father in Turkish society which is mother in private and father in public sphere try to fulfil their roles. It can be predicted continuity of traditional roles in society from the

roles children's parents take. Both schools' starting and finishing times gave clues about this issue for instance, mostly mothers brought and picked up the children, but some mornings some fathers brought their children before going to work. Teacher Zehra mentioned that not much has changed in mothers' working status based on her 34 years' experiences. Although more mothers have working status now, she said that mainly mothers look after children. Thus teachers engage with mothers more than fathers.

The division between mother and father roles in public and private life is normalised as the examples above exemplify. Both teachers used discourses that produce hegemonic masculinity without considering how this prevents them from seeing other forms of masculinities and femininities that can be performed by both males and females. As highlighted in the literature review, normalisation brings ignorance and leads to expecting some situations as they occur in a natural way (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). In this case, normalising hegemonic masculinity narrows down women's and men's roles. This normalisation was observed in teacher Fatma's interview, when I asked a reason for the constant exemplification of mother and father roles:

Nehir: Why are mainly women and men's roles explained in terms of mother and father?

Fatma teacher: To explain women and men, we can use mother and father roles. At that age it is very difficult for children to understand different roles for children. I am a mother for them and Goktug (her son) has a father who is a man. Men are fathers, women are mothers and their roles are different. This seems the only way to explain the roles of men and women.

Nehir: I mean for instance, there is no woman figure who is not a mother in practice?

Fatma teacher: ...Actually, I have never thought about it. Because why would a woman not have a baby... I have never thought about it. Generally, we think all women have a child.

(from the interview, 25 October 2013)

As discussed in the literature review, teachers are part of a gendered world. However, this does not mean that teachers are not aware of how hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity create unequal power relations between men and women. On the contrary, both teachers mentioned the unequal power relations between men and women by exemplifying non-traditional gender roles. As mentioned earlier, they thought that gendered roles are constructed through familial influences. Maybe therefore they tended to give non-traditional gender roles through mother and father roles. It was observed that certain tasks in relation to men and women were changed in their examples. For instance, one day when teacher Fatma entered the classroom, Sevda shouted loudly that she had seen teacher Fatma driving a mini-bus. This was surprising for most of the children and they looked at each other with confused faces. It is clear that driving a mini-bus was constructed as masculine activity. Teacher Fatma took an opportunity and started to say that driving a car is not a male activity only; women can drive as well. I can say that some of the children enjoyed encountering this example and they were proud of their teacher because she could do a difficult task that normally women cannot do based on their hegemonic masculinity knowledge. Engaging in technical and complicated tasks is

characteristic of hegemonic masculinity and this idea was challenged by teacher Fatma driving a mini-bus in this case.

Compared to teacher Fatma, teacher Zehra was more inclined to challenge gendered roles in her practices. There were two particular practices in Mavi that lessened gender separation. Every week teacher Zehra changed the children's seating arrangement by grouping 5-6 children for a table. She was careful about mixing the girls and boys in the groups; all of the groups had to include girls and boys. A similar logic was applied to free play time. Her strategy for this difficult task was to group different kinds of toys: blocks, kitchen and baby toys, animal sets and wooden blocks. Then each child was asked to choose one toy group and each group would contain five children at the most. However, due to an uneven number of girls and boys (7 girls and 18 boys), not all of the groups could be mixed. The teachers in MacNaughton's studies (1998, 2000) followed similar strategies to mix girls and boys but MacNaughton reveals that these strategies are not permanent solutions because children also reproduce gendered activities by themselves. Teacher Zehra tried to mix children by encouraging them to play together but, similar to MacNaughton's findings, the children in Mavi started to play separately in their free play time after a couple of minutes. However, it is safe to say that the practices of teacher Zehra still worked to weaken the power of hegemonic masculinity. For example, there were no car toys in the classroom because teacher Zehra said that sharing cars caused conflict between boys. It can be said that here teacher Zehra prevented hegemonic masculinity in the class; otherwise she would have spent more time resolving boys' conflicts.

Another important issue related to the teachers' approach to the two categories is related to their femaleness. It is safe to say that both teachers tended to support and care for the girls' category. It is necessary to point out that both female teachers can be seen to be in the same category as the girls. The teachers' authority status or adult status comes first, most of the time, for the children. However, both teachers' expressions show that the teachers sometimes put themselves in the same category as the girls. It is more like they know what being a girl means and girls become women¹⁸. Hence, it seems that they already have a common history with girls and girls will experience a similar future to theirs. This can unite women and girls under the roof of the female category. Suffering from hegemonic masculinity and sharing emphasised femininity could be the reasons for the teachers' closeness to the girls' category. For teacher Fatma this union was opposed to males. One day, when teacher Fatma saw Bilal, a boy, disturbing the play of two girls Yağmur and Cansu, she said to me all males were the same and females suffered because of them. But for teacher Zehra, this union referred to females understanding and supporting each other better. She told me several times that the most important reason why she had accepted me into her class was because she had girls who were similar in age to me and hence she could understand and support me.

It is necessary to point out that this closeness may naturalise girls as well-behaved and mature. When girls cross boundaries, they can be warned about their unexpected behaviour, for example 'as a girl it is not suited to you' (Francis, 1998). This is based on expectationsof emphasised femininity from girls. On the other hand, teachers tend to praise boys when they are quiet and sensible, for example, 'well done you behaved

¹⁸ Girl and women in the Turkish language, as, in English, refer to the difference between adults and children.

well today'. To put it another way, while girls' unexpected behaviours are emphasised negatively, boys' unexpected behaviours are praised positively. In this study, most of the time the girls in both classrooms performed emphasised femininity without crossing boundaries. Therefore, it was not very common to see teachers getting angry with girls. In addition to supporting the boys' unexpected positive behaviours, both teachers had a close relationship with the rulers of hegemonic masculinity. These rulers have knowledge about hegemonic masculinity and how it regulates gender relations. However, while teacher Zehra tried to negotiate with a boy called Bahadır to deal with his hegemonic masculinity power over others, teacher Fatma reproduced hegemonic masculinity by giving more power to a boy called Uğur.

Bahadır was defined as a 'difficult child' in teacher Zehra's terms. In my observation I noticed that she always engaged with him in particular. Bahadır performed hegemonic masculinity by occupying the classroom and wanting his friends to recognise and follow him. A boy called Alan, in Blaise's (2005) study, had a close relationship with a preservice teacher. This teacher listened to Alan's demands and suggestions by using her adult power. Teacher Zehra's close attention was not about collaborating but negotiating with Bahadır to lessen his power over the others. In order to do this she still needed to spend more time and effort with Bahadır. However, she did not apply or agree with Bahadır's rules; rather she tried to talk with him individually by explaining to him that he cannot control and rule others. For instance, Bahadır insisted on playing with a toy without sharing it with his friends. Teacher Zehra tried to explain to him what sharing is and why he should share toys with his friends. Teacher Zehra was aware that she was paying more attention to him than to the other children. She told me that she should not pay too much attention to

him but she felt closeness to him and she wanted to help him because he was a clever boy but did not know to regulate his behaviour. Although teacher Zehra expressed her closeness to Bahadır, she was careful to show no favour to him.

Teacher Fatma clearly said that her favourite student was Uğur. She told me how he was skilled and mature and that she gave many responsibilities to him. She called him 'my right arm'. When she came into the classroom Uğur welcomed her and took her bags. She also gave him some tasks like sending a letter to other teachers, or buying something from the school cafeteria. Uğur, as ruler of hegemonic masculinity in Nar, was also the president of the classroom. It is rare to see preschool classes with a classroom president but teacher Fatma thought that it was a good exercise for children to learn classroom management. Having this role made Uğur more powerful. He could control other forms of masculinities and femininities. In interviews some children mentioned Uğur as an authority of the classroom. Several times I saw that the children went to Uğur when they complained about each other and he listened to them and tried to solve the problem. He also warned boys to be gentle with girls because in his terms girls were neat and fragile but boys were aggressive and violent. However, his power over the children was even brutal sometimes which he sometimes beat some children. I witnessed some parents complaining about his control over the children. However, this did not change teacher Fatma's approach to Uğur; it strengthened his power more. According to teacher Fatma, there was no problem about Uğur's using power over other children because she thought that he was a powerful and confident child.

4.2.3 The Assistants of Teachers

Although the teacher assistants' status in the classrooms is not as strong as that of the teachers, it is necessary to understand their ideas about gender categories since they play a part in constructing hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity in classrooms. However, deeper data could not be collected about their opinions because neither of them wanted to be interviewed, as discussed in the methodology chapter. They gave a reason for their refusal, which was their duty to clean and order the classroom rather than being part of the children's education. In relation to these duties, Elif abla from Nar and Sevgi abla from Mavi tended to define the boys and girls' categories according to their clean usage of the classroom. Both of them complained about the boys making the spaces messy and dirty. On the other hand, they complimented the girls on their tidiness and cleanliness. The extract below shows how Elif abla 'suffered' from hegemonic masculinity:

The class returned to a messy place in fifteen minutes after craft activity. Scissors, papers, glues were all around the class. I could see how anxious and concerned Elif abla was from her face. She was probably thinking how she cleaned the class after that mess. Then she started to warn some of the boys who threw papers at each other. She turned to me and pointed the classroom by saying she really fed up of boys.

(from field diary in Nar, 21 October 2013)

In fact it was not easy to understand whether the boys or the girls had caused the mess but, according to Elif abla, the boys were responsible for this messy picture. On a different occasion she also told me that compared to the girls the boys were very unclean. When I asked the reason for her thinking, she said 'because boys are boys

and girls are girls and you cannot change it, just live with it'. Here I sensed a learned helplessness in her voice and expression because it seemed that she had experienced the same problem and she could not handle it; rather she accepted it. Her 'girls are girls and boys are boys' understanding influenced the way she ordered the classroom. Elif abla placed the dolls and kitchen toys on one side of the classroom and the cars and blocks on the other side. She tried to distance these places from each other because she believed that the boys disturbed the girls. As with the teachers, Elif abla tended to defend the girls against the boys. Again, suffering from hegemonic masculinity brings females together under emphasised femininity. Hence her classroom arrangements revealed that girls and boys are better if they are separate.

Similarly, Sevgi abla complained about the boys' messiness. In the extract below there is an assumption that all girls work tidily and properly. Sevgi abla already believed that the boys made a mess. However, I saw that Melike blew confetti as the boys did.

Today I came up with an incident that I am familiar with from Nar. As Elif abla, Sevgi abla got angry because Aydın, Burak and Serdar spilled confetti all around the class who were supposed to glue to papers. When Sevgi abla saw them, she was shocked. When she told them off, she compared their way of work with the girls and asked them why they did not work like girls.

(from field diary in Mavi, 24 February 2014)

Unlike Elif abla, Sevgi abla did not intervene in the two categories' play or space. This was related to the very structured role of Sevgi abla in the classroom. She was controlled by teacher Zehra constantly. The equality between girls and boys was the

main rule in relation to gender identities in Mavi. Therefore, this rule should not be broken by Sevgi abla either. Whenever I asked Sevgi abla about the relations between girls and boys, she said that her opinions did not need to be mentioned since she followed the rules of teacher Zehra.

4.2.4 Preschool Programme, Settings and Materials

Now I would like to touch briefly on how gender identities were represented in the curriculum, playing areas and story books. Although there were diverse practices related to gender in the two preschools settings, no specific issues related to gender were found in the 2013/2014 period early years' programme (MoNE, 2013). There was an instruction in one target in the social and emotional development area, which states 'a child can say 'her/his' physical traits like their sex, colour of skin, colour of hair, height, colour of eyes' (MoNE, 2013:28). I purposely use apostrophes for her/his because in the Turkish language there are no gender specific words. This gender neutral structure of the Turkish language could be one reason why no issues explicitly related to gender were found. Hence it is safe to say that the curriculum was gender neutral as the Turkish education system required. Going back to the target's instruction above, the children were expected to know their sex when they learn their identities. The programme did not emphasise the difference between children's biological sex and their gender identities. While it was expected that children need to know their biological sex, there was no reference to gender.

Teacher Zehra mentioned the children's biological sex when I asked about gender identities. She also talked about the target above; she used two practices to achieve this target in Mavi. One was a puzzle of the body of a girl and a boy and the other is watching a short movie called 'how was I born?'. The puzzles were a naked boy and

girl but their sexual organs were not shown. The difference was highlighted by long hair for the girl; apart from this there was no difference between the puzzles. The important point is here that these puzzles highlight the biological difference and remind children that girls and boys are different. The other practice, of showing a short movie, also emphasised the biological aspects of being male and female. The movie basically explains how the eggs of women and sperms of men are fertilized and women become pregnant. It is also about heterosexual relationships between men and women, which are represented by a happy family. The movie had two separate parts: one illustrating family life and one showing the fertilisation process. The connection between the two parts was not clear. Hence it could be hard to understand the movie without prior knowledge or explanations after it. However, after showing the movie, teacher Zehra and the children did not talk about it; rather they moved to the free playing area. I asked some of the children what they thought about the movie and I realised that they did not understand what eggs and sperms are. Eggs and sperms are given voice in the movie. Therefore the children talked about them as though they were characters in a movie. Teacher Zehra was excited to show me this movie because she thought that it was related to my research interest, which it is. It is safe to say that teacher Zehra was practising risky teaching (Blaise & Andrew, 2005) by showing this movie in a preschool class in Turkey since it can be dangerous to talk about issues related to sex and sexual intercourse with young children. However, as the programme requires teacher Zehra felt it necessary to teach children about their biological sex differences.

There was another part in the programme that can be related to gender identity. It is related to converting the homecorner area into a dramatic play area, as stated in the contextualisation chapter. The early years programme (2013) did not mention a

homecorner area; instead there was a dramatic play centre, which was defined as a place that encourages children to take different roles and dramatise everyday life incidents. Materials for this area were presented as puppets, play house toys, clothes, accessories, old phones, etc. in the programme. However, this change was not interpreted as a change to challenge gendered activities by the teachers. When I asked the teachers about this change, teacher Zehra interpreted this difference as just name changing because she said that the early years programme had been changed annually; however, according to teacher Zehra, just a few names and statements were changed. Similarly, teacher Fatma said that she could not follow the changes that MoNE made each year; rather she preferred to follow her own programme, which she created in her mind. As the teachers mentioned, the term homecorner area was used in both classrooms and there was no place called the dramatic play centre. Moreover, the homecorner did not have the materials mentioned for the dramatic play centre; rather there were mainly dolls, daily life materials like phones, irons, hair dryers etc. and kitchen toys. In other words, this change did not find a place in the classroom settings of both classrooms.

A number of studies have found that children reproduce gendered roles in the homecorner and block areas in early years classrooms (Danby & Baker, 1998; MacNaughton, 2000; Taylor & Richardson, 2005). Similar to these studies, hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity were performed in these areas by the children in both Nar and Mavi. Power relations between the two categories were observed in that the girls dominated the homecorner and the boys dominated the block areas; this will be detailed later. The roles that children imitate in these places are highly divided. However, this division also gives more opportunity to see how children cross boundaries. Taylor and Richardson (2005:171) found that some

children manage to subvert its (homecorner) intended design by transforming the space and performing counter-normative practices and identities within it. Therefore, although these spaces play an important role in reproducing gendered identities, this study also argues that they open up possibilities for children to perform non-gendered practices.

As discussed in the literature review, story books give messages about children's gender identities in preschool settings (Davies, 2003; Jackson, 2007; Eslen-Ziya & Erhart, 2013). It has been found that illustrations and texts of story books are interpreted by children within the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity. Some even aim to represent other forms of masculinities and femininities (Davies, 2003). There was no story time and there were few story books in the book corner in Nar. Hence it was not possible to explain the children's relation with story books in terms of their gender identities in Nar. In Mavi, the story books were part of the everyday activities; they were brought in by the parents. Teacher Zehra said that books should not contain violence and scary topics but that except for these conditions parents could bring all kinds of story books. I think that teacher Zehra did not want to take responsibility for choosing the books because she was aware that there are messages in stories and she preferred the parents take on this responsibility.

There were mainly Turkish classics like Kaloghlán and Nasreddin Hodja and world classics like Little Red Riding Hood and Snow White books in the book corner in Mavi. I would like to mention a specific story book that teacher Zehra wanted me to read to the children. This incident gives a clue about the relation between story books and children's gender identities in Mavi. It was *Betul in Bazaar* story of the series of

Betul character. In this story Betul and her mother visit to the bazaar to buy vegetables and fruits. While all salesman are men, the customers are women. The kitchen is presented in the women's area in the story and the necessities are provided by mothers. The role of father is presented as breadwinner who engage with certain tasks as the one of the scenes from the story reveals. In this scene, Betul tells her mother to buy watermelon but she also says they cannot carry it because of its weight. Then Betul suggests that her father carry it. After this suggestion, her mother thanks Betul for her thoughtfulness and says she will call her father to buy watermelon. In this scene, men's physical status is presented as strong and women as weak. It looks like the father involves to kitchen job but by doing certain things which in this case carrying watermelon. In addition to this, while it is obvious to understand that the father has a job, it is not clear whether mother works outside the home or not. However, these were not the questions or the issues in teacher Zehra's questions after reading the story. Teacher Zehra asked questions such as why they could not buy watermelons, what the solution was to this situation. These questions also reflect the dominant themes in the book. As a consequence, the children tried to give answers that pertain to the message of the story. Hence, there is a chain which started from the book and continued with the teacher and ended with the children. They all play a part to reproduce the traditional roles of mother and father.

4.3 Children

The previous sections aimed to show the representations of girls and boys in the eyes of the staff, curriculum and settings of preschool classrooms. Now I will discuss how children constructed the girl/boy binary in their identity construction through positioning the two categories as opposite, and seeing boys and girls differently from

each other. Then I will discuss the situations in which ‘us and them’ came together in Nar and Mavi.

4.3.1 Us and Them as Opposite

In Francis’s (1998) study children constructed their gender identities as opposite to each other and they see each category as two different kinds. The children in this study also positioned girls and boys as two opposite categories in both classrooms. The children’s awareness of two categories as opposites were observed from the language they used: ‘us’ and ‘them’ were the markers of their categories. When the children mentioned their gender category, they tended to use ‘us’ and for the other category ‘them’ in both classes. Their acceptance and normalisation of boy and girl as two distinct categories led me to read their expressions through this separation. This can prevent understanding the other categories that children may refer to by using ‘them’ for a group of friends rather than for boys or girls. Therefore, even if I sensed what they referred to by using ‘us’ and ‘them’ categories, I continued to ask who ‘us’ and ‘them’ were in order not to restrict possible categories and also to see how strong their normalisation was. Some of the children were surprised when I asked who they referred to by using ‘them’ because it was obvious for them to whom they referred. The reaction of Melike in Mavi is a good example of the normalisation of the separation:

Early morning, Melike arrived in the classroom. There were only 5 boys in the classroom at that moment who sat together. She looked at them and went directly to one of the empty tables. When I asked why she did not choose the other table, she told me it was because of ‘them’. When I said ‘them’ in a

questioning way, she said ‘Boys, boys!’ in an angry way because it was obvious for her that she referred to boys when she spoke of ‘them’.

(from field diary in Mavi, 19 February 2014)

It was more explicit to see the separation from the teachers’ language because us and them categories become girls and boys’ categories in the teachers’ language. The statements by teacher Fatma, such as ‘boys clean tables, girls order books’, or by teacher Zehra, such as ‘boys against girls, let’s see who is going to win!’, were examples of their common usage of language to separate boys and girls. Both teachers seemed not just to separate girls and boys as two categories but as two opposite categories. They made constant comparisons such as who was going to finish their work first, who was going to win a game, who was going to finish their lunch first, etc. This approach creates a competitive environment in the classroom and both groups seem keen to win. The field note below exemplifies this situation by teacher Zehra using two categories in the Opposite Word activity. Although the Opposite Word activity in the curriculum of 2013/2014 did not have the comparison of boys and girls in its examples, teacher Zehra used this comparison:

Today the warming up activity was Opposite Words when teacher Zehra said a word and the children gave an opposite of this word, like hot-cold, small-big, tall-short. It was a really noisy activity as the children really enjoyed to shout opposite words. When teacher Zehra said ‘girls’, the children shouted ‘boys’, but they did not just shout the word, they also gave each other strange looks that kind of reminded of the girls versus boys competition.

(from field diary in Mavi, 17 February 2014)

Teacher Zehra's interpretation of the curriculum was interpreted by the children as their mimics and jest showed. It was easy to see that this comparison was not a mere comparison as hot/cold for some children, it contains meanings and tension. Even teacher Zehra's intention may not be to nourish the competition in this activity, it worked like that for some children. Melike mentioned Opposite Words in her interview when we were talking about toys. For Melike, toys for boys and girls were different and this division could be supported by the example of the Opposite Words of girl/boy.

Nehir: Do you play with cars?

Melike: No, girls do not play with cars (showing surprise in her face).

Nehir: Why?

Melike: Because cars for boys.

Nehir: Are there toys for girls as well?

Melike: Hmmm... This reminds to me something. Opposites!

Nehir: Opposites?

Melike: Yes!! Boys-girls are opposites.

(from the interview, 25 February 2014)

Not just during the activity, children can bring or use the meanings they understand to different contexts as well. It was not surprising that like Melike a number of children seemed to bring their teachers' usage of girl/boy comparison into their

conversations. Particularly teachers' strong positions in these two classrooms increased the value of their claims in the children's eyes. Although one of the main properties of the curriculum of 2013/2014 was its child-centred character (MoNE, 2013:13), the observation of classrooms showed that in both classrooms teachers were the centre of all practices and decisions. Compared to teacher Fatma, teacher Zehra was keener to involve the children in decision-making processes, but in general both teachers tended to see their roles as an authority who knows what is the best for children. As a consequence of this understanding, most of the time the children acknowledged their teachers' claims as truths. Hence the children imitated and quoted their teachers' claims in their conversation to justify their positions. For instance, the conversation between teacher Fatma and I appeared in Esra's talk with her girlfriends. I surprisingly witnessed that teacher Fatma's words were repeated by Esra but while teacher Fatma said these words as a compliment giver, Esra said the same words as a compliment taker.

Today teacher Fatma told me several times how girls are well-behaved and they always play quietly comparing to boys' aggressive and noisy qualities. After a while I heard Esra stated exactly the same words to her girlfriends to praise girls' category. There was something in her voice. Teacher Fatma's acknowledge of their goodness against boys made her happy.

(from field diary in Nar, 5 November 2013)

Teachers are expected to make judgements about both categories as an outsider audience of girl and boy competition. As Goffman (1959) claims individuals play their roles differently according to their audiences, in different stages. In the classroom context audience segregation occurs when boys and girls try to impress

their teachers. It is important for children to hear an outsider's view about their gender categories. Especially if it is a positive comment they would like to share this with the other members of their category as Esra did. But the real amusement is using the most powerful audience's comment as weapon to other categories member which Esra did this as well. On another occasion, Esra said the same claim to Umut who tried to get involved in girls' play. But this time she was not using it to praise her category only, but also to remind the boys that teacher Fatma is on their side.

Umut: I am going to play with you!!

Esra: No, you cannot.

Umut: Why?

Esra: Because you are noisy and make me tired.

Umut: I am not noisy!

Esra: Yes, you are. If you do not believe me ask teacher Fatma because she thinks that you (she means boys) are noisy. But we are well-behaved, aren't we? (she said to this her girlfriends and they responded by nodding)

(from field diary in Nar, 5 November 2013)

When children construct their gender category as oppositional, it is possible to see dislike and ignorance of the other category (Blaise, 2005). Some boys tended to ignore and dislike other category members in this study. It was surprising to see how some children could be ignorant of the other category in spite of sharing many commonalities in the same classroom environment. For instance, in the interview

when I asked Cem from Nar which friends he likes to play with, he mentioned some boys' names. When I said I saw him and Emine playing together just recently, he told he had not known any girls' names in the class. Then I started to tell some other girls' name from the class and he asked me that I meant the girl who has long hair or wears pink shirt. First, I doubted that he really did not know any girls' name however, I did not see him to call any girl by her name later on in the data collection period. Due to Cem being the youngest in the class and the school term had started nearly two months ago, it may be acceptable. However, he did know the boys' names. Therefore, it clearly related to Cem's distanced relation with the girls which below quotation revealed this relation more precisely.

Nehir: You said you do not have any girlfriends in the class then do you have any outside the class for instance, in your neighbourhood?

Cem: No, I do not like girls.

Nehir: Why?

Cem: Because they are girls. I never play with girls!

(from the interview, 7 November 2013)

The way of Cem's saying 'I never play with girls' was very sharp. This suggests that he was kind of proud of himself for not playing with girls. Similar to Cem, a number of children expressed their views negatively when the issue was about 'them'. Their first explanation of this negativity was simple because 'they do not like each other'. Most of the children could not give clear answers why they did not like 'them'. It seems that being in the opposite group was one of the reasons for them to not like

each other. This understanding was normalised by both the boys and the girls and they also accepted that the opposite group does not like them as well. The quote from the interview with Çağrı, a boy in Mavi, expressed this understanding well while we were talking about the differences and similarities between boys and girls.

Nehir: Do you think is there any common thing that boys and girls share?

Çağrı: Girls love each other, boys love each other.

Nehir: Do they love each other?

Çağrı: Ihihhh (means no).

(from the interview, 5 March 2014)

4.3.2 Us and Them are Different

Most of the children in the interviews stated that girls and boys are different in terms of their physical appearance, play, toys and their future mother and father roles. Although the interview question, ‘Do you think girls and boys are different?’, evokes this issue, the question about the similarities was not given as much attention as the differences in either classroom. While some emphasised the differences based on physical differences like hair length (Oğuz, Mehmet, Murat from Nar; Berna, Çağrı, Özlem, Arif, Hakan, Umut, Bahadır from Mavi), only one girl, Zeynep, from Mavi stated that boys have a penis and this is different from girls. Çağrı from Mavi stated that circumcision of boys is a difference between boys and girls. This difference may refer to a biological difference for Çağrı but it also has religious and cultural meanings. There were other incidents, which happened in Mavi, that will be

discussed in the following sections to show how religion plays a part in the construction of gender identities.

Some children (Berna, Nida, Koray, Cem from Mavi; Uğur, Cansu from Nar) stated that girls and boys wear different clothes. A number of children in Nar also differentiated the colours of girls' and boys' clothes. Moreover, they were aware that their uniform colours were different based on their sex. Some of them emphasised this difference by saying that girls wear pink clothes and boys wear blue or dark coloured clothes in their classroom. It is safe to say that the children in Nar tended to use the colour division more than the children in Mavi in relation to their school uniforms since the girls had pink and the boys had blue uniforms in Nar.

Another difference between the girls and boys that the children raised related to the nature of their play. While the boys' play was labelled as violent and aggressive, the girls' play was seen as calm and not naughty. These characteristics of their play are closely related to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity. From Nar, Umut mentioned about a game that the boys played in the class and his comments give a clue about the ways of seeing the nature of girls' and boys' play. According to him, playing violent games is normal for boys however, it is not suitable for girls. Even Umut labelled this game as disgusting, he would like to play it because it is acceptable for a boy to engage with something violent in his view. It is even necessary to show their engagement with these violent games as hegemonic masculinity required.

Umut: Do you know the Puss in Boots game?

Nehir: No, I do not know.

Umut: I am a Puss and Uğur is a dog now. Others are enemies. We are fighting and firing guns. Some die, some are beheaded.

Nehir: It seems frightening.

Umut: Yes, it is.

Nehir: Does any girl play this game with you?

Umut: No, this is a disgusting game. It is not for girls.

Nehir: Why do you want to play then?

Umut: Because, I like Puss in Boots.

(from the interview, 31 October 2013)

Similar to Umut, Emine from Nar accepted boys' playing style is cruel. When the boys played car racing in free play time, her mimics and comments on boys' play revealed that it was normal for her to see boys' cruel playing.

There was chaos in the class. The boys were playing car racing by running around then they crushed each other close to the girls' homecorner. Then Emine looked at me and said how cruel they were and the boys are always like this. She also nodded her head like there is nothing to do with this cruelty.

(from the field diary in Nar, 7 November 2013)

On the other hand, some boys defined girl's play as boring. Although they accepted that girls play peacefully and calmly, these traits mostly refer to uninteresting plays

for them. Generally, the boys pointed out that playing babies does not mean anything to them. The idea of boys engaging with more complex tasks may reveal itself in this situation and playing babies seems not complex to the boys in both classes. The question is: are girls' dialogue based plays less complex than boys' plays. Apparently as Hakan from Mavi asserted in his interview, it is not for boys.

Nehir: Do you play in the homecorner?

Hakan: No. I just watch them (he means the girls) and then I get bored and play something different.

Nehir: Why?

Hakan : Because I do not like girls. They just cook and have babies.

(from the interview, 10 March 2014)

Girls and boys' playing culture seems different and it was found that popular cartoons and their products nourish these differences. The representations of boy and girl characters in popular cartoons are not the concern of this study. However, it is safe to say that they carry meanings about gender identities (Caldes-Coulthard & Leeuwen, 2002). In both classes, especially two cartoons series and their products were prominent: Lightning McQueen for the boys and Winx Club for the girls. In Lightning McQueen cars speak and race, and in Winx Club modern fairies go adventures. When Lightning McQueen use black and red colours in their products, pink and purple are the dominant colours of Winx products. I saw the various products of these cartoons in both classrooms. Cem from Nar mentioned his great

admiration for Lightning McQueen and how his clothes even his socks are McQueen products:

Nehir: Why do you think girls and boys uniform colours are different?

Cem: Pink and purple for girls. I wear a bit black.

Nehir: Don't you like pink?

Cem: No, because I like Lightning McQueen. My mother promised me to buy a McQueen pencil case, yesterday.

Nehir: Really?

Cem: Yes, my everything is McQueen, my bed, my pyjamas, even my socks!!

(from the interview, 7 November 2013)

These kinds of popular culture products mainly target either girls or boys which this approach divides girls and boys. Especially their main characters present desired gender roles for boys and girls which mainly represent dominant understandings of male and female portraits. For instance, in Nar Mehmet told me about his dream in a very exciting way. He saw he was a Spiderman and jumped between houses and helped people. Sevda was there when Mehmet was telling me about his dream and she started to talk about how much she loved Barbie and her hair and clothes. In these examples, Spiderman as a strong male character and Barbie as a beautiful female character can be role models for Mehmet and Sevda. Also there was a cartoon called Pepe which both boys and girls follow. Pepe is a very famous cartoon that was

featured on Turkish national public broadcast (TRT). Many children in both classrooms have Pepe cartoon products. It was clear from their conversations many of them watch this cartoon regularly. Not just at home, they also watched this cartoon in Nar and Mavi. I had a chance to watch one part in Nar with the children and also I have watched other parts of Pepe before. This cartoon is about stories of Pepe and his family which represent the dominant nuclear family structure, mother, father and two children, a boy and a girl. It is safe to say that the roles that are determined by hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity are given by Pepe's traditional family life. The cartoon is also famous as being a national product. It has a mission which is teaching children their own culture and values rather than foreigners' culture and values.

The Pepe cartoon sends diverse images and messages to its audience about the roles of women and men by family concept. As discussed in the teacher section earlier family is seen as vital in children's construction of gender identities. The question of the differences between girl and boy reminded some children about mother and father roles. In other words, they made a connection between girl/boy and mother/father binaries. Mrs. Deniz from Mavi stated that the children learn to be mother and father from their families as mentioned earlier. In other words, their future roles in the family differentiate boys and girls. Umut from Nar remembered what his mother and father do in a picnic to explain this difference.

Nehir: Do you think is there any differences between boys and girl?

Umut: This will be a mother. Then grandmother and granddad. Then, children and they look after them. Then mother prepares food and dad prepares barbecue.

Nehir: Does dad prepare food?

Umut: Just barbecue.

Nehir: Does mum do barbecue?

Umut: No, because men are strong.

Nehir: Not women?

Umut: Women strong as that (he showed his fingers with small gap) and men strong as that (he opened his arms).

(from the interview, 31 October 2013)

In this extract, apparently Umut thought while mother cooks which cooking not require power according to him, father uses his strength to do the barbecue. The same question opened up the role division issue in Murat's interview from Nar. In his views, mother and father roles seem very rigid because as he said 'mum is mum and dad is dad'.

Nehir: Do you think there are differences between boys and girl?

Murat: Yes.

Nehir: How?

Murat: I like nut chocolate, then ice cream, playing with cars... I like to help mum when she cooks a cake. I give the cake tin to her.

Nehir: You help your mother. Do you help your father too?

Murat: I help my father to clean our car.

Nehir: Does your mum help your father to clean the car?

Murat: No, because she is a mother not a father.

Nehir: Do your mum and dad cook together?

Murat: No because mum is mum and dad is dad. Mums cook and clean.

Nehir: What about fathers?

Murat: Other things. (he was bored and changed the item)

(from the interview, 31 October 2013)

In addition to all of these differences that the children mentioned, Nida from Mavi said that the names of girls and boys are different. I think this difference is the most normalised difference between girls and boys since only Nida raised it. Her point reminds us of how language plays a vital role in the creation of gendered discourses. As Nida noticed, most of the time one can assume one's sex from names in Turkish society as can be seen in other societies. Names are signs and they can signify biological sex. For instance, throughout this text the names of the girls and boys that I have used cannot be understood by non-Turkish speakers. Hence I have tried to highlight their biological sex by adding extra information. The necessity of highlighting one's sex by naming is an issue for this study since it has a close relationship with one's gender. However, it also shows how binary understandings are constructed through names.

4.3.3 Us and Them Together

Differences between us and them led inevitably to gender separation in Nar and Mavi. Therefore, bringing ‘us and them’ together mostly reminded the children of negative situations. In both classes, the children tried to find ways for gender separation. Such as some begged the teacher to change her/his place in a group or tried to convince other friends to swap their seating. It was clear to see that the children become upset when they were not sitting or playing with friends from their gender category.

There are five toy groups in free play time: wooden blocks, plastic blocks, kitchen toys and babies, animals, and circle Lego. Each child choses to their group but maximum five children can be in the same group. Therefore, sometimes boys and girls have to be in the same toy group. Today, Arif had to be in a group with four girls to play with kitchen and dolls. He was very upset and he did not play for a while. I think he was waiting for the other children to change their places because after 10-15 minutes everyone play what and with whom they really want to play. Not surprisingly, Arif moved to his male friends’ group.

(from field notes in Mavi, 18 February 2014)

Like Arif many children in Mavi changed their play groups to be with their category members in free play time. The scene always started with groups of boys and girls sitting together and finished with the boys and the girls playing separately. It was not problematic when two girls and three boys play in a group for the children. The problem was being the only boy or only girl in the group. For instance, there are four girls in a group and three girls and a boy in the other group. Most probably a boy

prefers to be with the second group even if they are not good friends or do not like each other with the other boy in the boys' group. It seemed that the 'worst' boy is better than being in the girls' group. For the girls the situation was not that strong because if a girl does not like the other girl, she may prefer to be the only one in the boys' group rather than creating a new group. Being the only girl in a boys' group mostly meant playing alone however, being the only boy in a girls' group did not mean the same thing. Most of the time the boys ignored the only girl in the group. For instance, one time Zeynep was the only girl in a group and she was invisible for the boys in Mavi. The boys shared their roles and toys and started their play. Zeynep even did not attempt to join their play, she just created her own play.

Generally, bringing us and them together meant negativity for most of the children as discussed above. The questions like do you play with 'them', or do you have any friends from 'them' mainly were answered with no. Even many children gave their no in surprising and angry ways. For instance, Çağrı sounded angry when I asked the reason he was not playing with girls in his interview.

Nehir: Who are your friends in the class?

Çağrı: Aydın, Burak.

Nehir: Any girls?

Çağrı: Hihi (means yes)

Nehir: What do you play with them?

Çağrı: Nothing.

Nehir: Why?

Çağrı: I do not like girls. Girls are bad and I am not a girl.

Nehir: Why do you think they are bad?

Çağrı: Nooooo! I do not like to play with them.

(from the interview, 5 March 2014)

It was possible to be friends with ‘them’ outside the class but being friends was rare inside the class. Interestingly, a number of boys mentioned playing with girls outside the classroom was different than playing with them in the class. There were two distinct examples of this situation in Nar. The first one was about Oğuz and Emine who were cousins. I did not know that they are cousins until in the interview Emine talked about Oğuz and how he does not want to play with her in the class. She said they played a lot outside the school but in the class Oğuz did not allow her to play with him. Also Emine said that she actually wanted to play with Oğuz in the class but he did not let her sit near to him. Hence, it was difficult to understand they are cousins and spend time together because it seemed they do not have any close relations. In this case while Emine does not find any problem to play with him in the class, it is not acceptable for Oğuz. I was curious about Oğuz’s views about this issue and in the interview he just gave short answers and did not want to talk about it.

Nehir: I have just learned that you and Emine are cousins but I have not seen much you play together in the class?

Oğuz: No.

Nehir: Do you play with her outside the school?

Oğuz: Yes.

Nehir: Why you do not play in the class?

Oğuz: Because I do not want to.

Nehir: Because you play something different at home?

Oğuz:.....

(from the interview, 5 November 2013)

From observations, Oğuz's particular attempts not play and even not sit with Emine related to his insistence to stay in boys' territory otherwise there could be a risk that he can be excluded by other boys. Similar to Oğuz and Emine, Ömer, Umut and Esra did not play in the class together but outside the class. They live in the same area and their apartments are near to each other. It was obvious that Ömer and Umut are good friends however, in the interview with Ömer, he said that Esra and Umut were his good friends and they always played together in the playground in their neighbourhood. When I asked the reason that I had not seen the three of them playing in the class, he said because Esra played with dolls. In this case, playing with dolls separates their playing areas and not surprisingly Ömer or Umut would not like to play with babies. However, the point is here even they would not like to play together with babies or other toys, it is difficult to understand they have external relationship due to their distanced relation in the class. In addition to the above examples a number of children mentioned that they have girl/boy friends in their neighbourhoods but not in the class. This finding illustrates that the us and them

division in the classroom puts pressure on the children. Particularly for boys it is more difficult to cross boundaries between territories in the classroom settings. This can relate to boys' fear of losing their powerful positions in other boys' eyes, which will be discussed in the following section.

What brings us and them together is heterosexual romantic relations. In both Nar and Mavi, it was acceptable to break the us and them division if there was a romantic relation. Both girls and boys can stay safe together under the name of love. Hence, in one way, this brings us and them together. However, it prevents the children from becoming friends because whenever a girl and a boy play together alone or want to sit together this is read by other children as a love relation. Friendship was the most difficult relation for the girls and the boys to establish in these preschool settings. Whenever a girl and a boy played alone a couple of times, they were most likely to be seen as lovers rather than friends. Maybe therefore, talking about girls and boys together invites the idea of being in love for a number of children. When I talked about friendship between boys and girls, many children comprehended the issue as I was referring romantic boyfriend, girlfriend relations as Eyüp from Mavi expressed in his interview.

Nehir: Do you play with the girls in your class?

Eyüp: Actually, I fell in love with Ceylin.

Nehir: Really, does she know this?

Eyüp: Yes, she knows.

(from the interview, 6 March 2013)

The first thing Eyüp talked about girls was his love for Ceylin. It was normalised to think girl and boy in a romantic relationship in both classes. Hence, some children mentioned shyness to talk about the relation between girl and boy. Azra from Nar said she was shy about boys in her interview. Like Eyüp, she did not think that I was talking about being friends in first place rather she took up the issue as girlfriend/boyfriend issue.

Nehir: Do you play with the boys in the class?

Azra: Nooo!! I do not like boyfriends.

Nehir: I mean friends like your girlfriends Yağmur, Esra.

Azra: I do not like to talk with boys.

Nehir: Why?

Azra: Because, I am shy.

(from the interview, 4 November 2013)

Azra's shyness was closely related to being seen as a girl who 'likes' boys because liking a boy is possible if you have romantic feelings. For instance, Esma in Mavi said, 'I am not fond of boys' when I asked whether she liked to play with boys. Spending time together calls for having a love relationship in these cases and this understanding may distance some girls from boys. Nida in Mavi even would not like to talk with the boys and teacher Zehra told me about how Nida stopped her relations with the boys. Teacher Zehra saw one day Nida crying without a reason and when she asked the reason Nida was crying, she said if Ali - a boy from her neighbourhood

- continues to love her, she can become a stone because her mother told her that if she speak with boys in her age Allah turns her to stone. Her mother's religious threat distanced Nida from the boys in the class. Teacher Zehra said she told Nida it was not true and she can be friends with boys. After that Zehra teacher said she talked with Nida's mother about this issue and her mother stated if Nida's father heard this, he could kill her. It was quite a strong statement suggesting that religion has strong place in Turkish society as well. The role of men and women in Muslim society influences children's construction of gender identities. Ahmet's story revealed another dimension of the place of religion in gender roles. Ahmet really like to talk with me about his home life and we kind of built a friendship. One day he told me happily that he will go to his grandmother's house and everybody will be there. Then he added that just women will be there not any men because the women will read the Qur'an. He was talking about Mawlid which is an Islamic tradition that people read parts from Qur'an by melodic voice for special days like circumcision ceremony, birth and death. Men cannot take part in these ceremonies but Ahmet said he can go because he is a child. This shows that as a boy he can be accepted because he is a child but for Nida it was not the same. The religious rules start to intervene in girls' lives earlier than in boys' lives. While Ahmet was seen as a child, Nida's girl identity came before her childhood in these examples. It seems that religion is kind of a barrier to bring us and them together in Nida's case.

It is safe to claim that in this togetherness the position of girls and boys not the same as the above examples demonstrate. I would like to exemplify this difference with another two examples from Mavi. Mustafa from Mavi emphasised his shyness as Azra did about being a friend with other category members but again it was not friendship that his further statements revealed:

Nehir: Who do you like to play with in the class?

Mustafa: Emin, Koray, Bahadır?

Nehir: Any girls?

Mustafa: No!

Nehir: Why?

Mustafa: Because I am embarrassed.

Nehir: Because of girls?

Mustafa: Yes. But among girls, I just have one darling.

Nehir: Darling?

Mustafa: Yes, Ceylin.

Nehir: Ceylin.

Mustafa: Actually, I have one more darling in the class, Berna.

Nehir: You have two darlings then.

Mustafa: Yes but I told you I am shy and do not want to talk about it!

(from the interview, 4 March 2014)

Although Mustafa said that he was shy, he told me that he had two girlfriends. Apparently this shyness did not prevent him from talking about his romantic relations. All of the children in the class knew about their relations. This

heterosexual relationship strengthened the power of Mustafa, Berna and Ceylin because, as mentioned before, the heterosexual relationship is the main feature of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity (Connell, 1987). It was also observed that Melike, in Mavi, had more than one lover but I did not see them together, I heard Melike saying to Engin ‘today I will love Ahmet not you’. It is safe to say that Mustafa’s and Melike’s relationships were not announced in similar ways in the classroom. While all of the children and even teacher Zehra were aware of Mustafa’s relationships, I did not see any children talking about Melike’s lovers. This is closely related to the positions of girls and boys in heterosexual relationships. Both fulfil their roles by performing heterosexual relationships. However, it is hard to claim that the positions of girls and boys are the same in this relationship since emphasised femininity requires fulfilling the interests and desires of men (Connell, 1987).

The discussion above reveals that the togetherness of us and them is possible if both categories play their roles as their masculinities and femininities require in classroom settings. If these roles are challenged, bringing us and them together becomes more difficult and conflicts between the two categories arise. In the following part I will discuss these conflicts and children’s attempts and successes in crossing boundaries.

4.4 Staying in or Crossing the Boundaries?

It seems that the so-called differences constructed by the children and preschools draw visible and invisible boundaries between the two categories in Nar and Mavi. The children tried to stay in their territory by policing themselves and others to do their gender right more than performing other forms of masculinities and femininities but this does not mean that these boundaries were not crossed by the children. Davies

(2003) mentions that the binary understanding is embedded in language as we talk about girls and boys. This usage brings children's gender into the centre of their identities and it also prevents us from seeing other ways of being, and different positions that children take. However, in fact it is very difficult to claim that all boys behave aggressively and violently, or that all girls are nurturing and calm:

Any one child has access to a variety of ways of being, depending on who s/he is with, the particular context s/he is in and the discourse in which s/he is situated. The taking up of one position or another does not mean that that is who the person is/rather, it means that it is merely one of the ways in which that person is capable of positioning her/himself. (Davies, 2003:117)

As Davies points out above, children can perform different roles and they are aware of available positions they can take. In this part I try to explain other ways of being and how children's attempts to perform unpredictable roles are responded to and how some children go beyond the gender binary while others do not, by focusing on the importance of hegemonic masculinity.

4.4.1 Suffering from Hegemonic Masculinity

Both boys and girls made attempts to cross boundaries in both classrooms. It is safe to say that hegemonic masculinity is the biggest barrier for children in challenging gendered roles. Hence going beyond is different for girls and boys since hegemonic masculinity refers to the subordination of other masculinities and women (Connell, 1987). However, it also refers to something common in that both masculinities and femininities suffer from hegemonic masculinity when they attempt to cross boundaries. I will first try to argue how boys suffer from hegemonic masculinity by

policing themselves and each other. Then it will be shown how difficult it is for girls to even attempt to cross boundaries.

Observations suggest that there is pressure on children to play their expected roles. Not to be seen as deviant is one of the main concerns of children when they construct their gender identities. Davies (2003:31) calls this category maintenance work which:

is aimed partly at letting the “deviant” know they have got it wrong –teasing is often enough to pull someone back into line– but primarily it is aimed at maintaining the category as a meaningful category in the face of the individual deviation that is threatening it.

Hence children police others to remind them to do their gender right and they also try to control themselves to stay within boundaries. The extract below from the interview with Bora from Mavi shows how he felt it necessary to stop himself from playing with girls:

Nehir: Who do you like to play with in the class?

Bora: Serdar, Engin.

Nehir: Any girl?

Bora: Yes, Özlem.

Nehir: What do you play together?

Bora: Different things.

Nehir: Like in the homecorner?

Bora: No, we play at home, not here. I play with boys here in class.

Nehir: Why?

Bora: Because if I play, they feel offended.

Nehir: Why do they feel offended?

Bora: Because I do not play with them.

(from the interview, 27 February 2014)

Bora thought that if he played with girls his boy friends would not like the situation. He did not clearly explain what happened if he played with girls but preferring girls not boys as playmates had negative consequences in his eyes. Hence rather than encountering the problems Bora gave up playing with girls. In other words, Bora drew his boundaries before his friends could draw them. He did not want to take a risk or challenge his friends; rather he wanted to stay in the safe arms of hegemonic masculinity by suffering from its restrictions. Similarly, Murat from Nar reminded himself of what his category required from him in his interview when we talked about gender separation in their play in the classroom:

Nehir: Why do you think girls and boys play separately?

Murat: Because girls' hair is long (he showed his hair). Maybe I should cut my hair.

Nehir: Why?

Murat: Because it is like girls' hair.

Nehir: Can't boys have long hair?

Murat: No, just short hair.

(from the interview, 31 October 2013)

It was obvious that Murat really liked his hair. However, at the same time he was aware that the lessons he had learned did not match with his wish to have long hair. It was clear that when his hair became longer, his challenges would increase as well. Therefore, cutting his hair would cut out his possible problems like being teased about having hair like a girl. As with Bora, Murat reminded himself of what others might think by saying 'because it is like girls' hair'. He did not want to hear this from others so he said it to himself before they could. The fear of being teased by others led both boys to give up what they wanted to do.

On the other hand, some children may take risks but they might be stopped by others. In other words, the fear of Bora and Deniz can become true for some because boys closely police each other to play their gender right (Askew & Ross, 1988; Danby & Baker, 1998). As the examples above show there is a fear of being seen as a 'girl' and therefore engaging with feminine discourses seems dangerous for boys. Ulaş from Mavi took this risk without realising the danger. Ulaş showed his drawing to me and said that he would use the colour pink next. When Engin heard the word pink, he immediately warned him that all the other children on the table were boys. He did not say any more but it was obvious that he was saying that the colour pink is not for boys. Ulaş did not reply to him but he did not use the colour pink because this warning revealed the danger that he had not realised earlier. Ulaş did not approach

the colour pink as a girls' colour; it was just a colour he wanted to use and therefore he did not intend to cross boundaries. This shows that not every child approaches colours in a gendered way but after he was reminded that his approach was wrong he did not want to use the colour pink. A similar case happened on another occasion, again in Mavi. This time Selim wanted to choose pink dough as explained in the field note below.

In playing dough time, Bahadır started to shout and he said that Selim had taken girls' colour dough which was pink. Bahadır said Selim could not take it because its girls' colour. Selim was very sad and he felt it was important to explain himself that he had actually wanted yellow colour one and he had taken to the pink one to give Esma. He even felt guilty to take this colour and he wanted to change it. Teacher Zehra said there were no girl or boy colours and tried to convince him that he could use any colour. However, Selim insisted and he took different colour.

(from the field diary in Mavi, 26 February 2014)

In this incident, Selim felt pressure not to use pink dough from Bahadır, who was one of the rulers of hegemonic masculinity in Mavi. Bahadır knew that announcing Selim's choice would also give a message to the other children. Bahadır performed his masculinity by showing that he knew how a boy should behave. Selim did not want to be labelled as a deviant and he tried to pretend not to choose the pink dough but it was too late. Selim was one of the rulers of hegemonic masculinity in the classroom. Therefore he upset himself as well and he insisted that he wanted another colour but not pink. Teacher Zehra tried to encourage him to ignore this pressure but his friend's shouting was more powerful than teacher Zehra's encouragement.

Similar to Ulaş, Selim did not intend to choose the pink colour to go against his category; rather he just happened to like pink. This shows how difficult it was even to play with pink dough for these boys.

It was also seen that there is pressure on boys to behave as hegemonic masculinity requires. This was more visible than the pressures on girls to behave as emphasised femininity requires. This finding shows the power of hegemonic masculinity over emphasised femininity as well. Less powerful masculinities suffered from hegemonic masculinity and this was more visible than femininities' suffering from it. When a boy wants to engage with femininities as a less powerful position, this draws attention because it seems strange to give up masculine power. On the other hand, when a girl wants to engage with masculinities, it seems more reasonable to want to be powerful through masculinities. As mentioned in the literature review, Thorne (1993) highlights this difference by the usage of the terms 'tomboy' and 'sissy girl'. While the term sissy girl is used to describe a 'failed' boy, the term tomboy refers to a strong and powerful girl. No specific words were used by the preschoolers in Nar and Mavi. However, it was possible to hear someone saying to a boy not to do something 'like a girl' and 'behave as boys do', as seen in the above examples. I did not hear anyone telling girls not to behave 'like a boy'; rather girls were warned to behave like girls.

This invisibility actually means that girls are under more pressure than boys because they have a double burden. First they need to pass the gatekeepers of emphasised femininity and then the more powerful gatekeepers of hegemonic masculinity. To put it in a different way, it seems more difficult for girls to cross boundaries since the gatekeepers of hegemonic masculinity are more powerful than them. May be

therefore, it was rare to see girls attempt to explore different ways of being a girl. On the other hand, it is hard to claim that girls play powerless and passive femininity roles only. The idea of girls having power by playing a mother role in the domestic sphere has been highlighted in the literature (MacNaughton, 2000; Davies, 2003). Two girls in this study, Esra and Emine from Nar, by playing a mother role, regulated other children by arranging their play and distributing roles. Not surprisingly, strong gatekeepers of hegemonic masculinity did not get involved in their play because they did not accept being under the control of girls. The important point here is that playing a mother role may give power to girls. However, it does not help girls to play other forms of femininities or masculinities.

Teacher Zehra's intervention in Mavi opens up possibilities for girls to engage with boys' activities in a space dominated by boys. I observed that Nida and Zeynep went beyond the activities that emphasised femininity offers in their free play time. However, this situation left them alone. It is safe to say that not displaying the expected femininities or masculinities left children alone. This loneliness, and the risk of being excluded, put barriers in front of the children with regard to crossing boundaries but some of the children took the risk of being alone. As mentioned before, in free play time, five toy groups were put in the centre of the classroom in Mavi and the children chose their groups. The girls and boys were balanced and not having more than 6 children in a group gave both boys and girls a chance to engage in different activities. One day Zeynep did not choose the homecorner toys group as most of the girls had done. First, I was not surprised to see this choice because I knew that after 5 or 10 minutes the boys and girls would go back to their traditional ways and play separately. The four boys in her group did not let Zeynep into their play. However, this did not mean that they were not aware of Zeynep; rather it means

that as a girl she was not part of their play. Zeynep also knew this. Therefore, she took some blocks from the toy box and went somewhere near to the group and started to play by herself. Normally a conflict might occur in this scene because the boys would not let her take the toys but due to teacher Zehra's regulation, the boys did not intervene. A deal was made: Zeynep did not attempt to be involved in their play and the boys did not make any problems for her in sharing the toys. In this incident Zeynep did not give up playing with these toys even though she might have been lonely. However, her resistance did not last long because she accepted her girl friends' invitation to play with them in the homecorner area. The girls did not say anything negative about her engagement; rather they really wanted her to play with them. While boys tended to announce and tease 'deviants', girls did not focus on excluding deviants; they included her and took her back to the safe arms of emphasised femininity.

On the other hand, Nida was more resistant than Zeynep. The same situation happened in Nida's case but this time with a difference. Other girls did not invite her to play or insist on her playing with them. When I asked what Esma thought about Nida playing alone with blocks, she told me that Nida liked to play with these toys. It seems that they accepted and knew that Nida wanted to engage with blocks. I think that her resistance was important to build this idea in her friends' minds. Contrary to the other children mentioned earlier, Nida took a risk and preferred to be alone; she did not give up what she wanted to do. In addition, as discussed earlier, Nida tried to distance herself from the boys due to her mother warning her about the danger of being in love with a boy. Even this danger did not stop her from crossing boundaries. She was excluded by hegemonic masculinity and no girl attempted to join her play.

4.4.2 Under the Safe Arms of Hegemonic Masculinity

The confusion of staying within, or crossing, boundaries caused some problems for the children mentioned above. While most of them gave up their other ways of being, Nida did not give up but accepted being excluded by others. In this section I will discuss how some of the children used hegemonic masculinity to perform other forms of femininities and masculinities without giving up what they wanted to do and that they were not excluded by others. In other words it will be argued that using hegemonic masculinity opens doors to other ways of beings. I will explain these performances by focusing on the power relations between children in entering the homecorner and block areas.

It was possible to see boys and girls playing together as long as everybody played their gender right in Nar and Mavi. The homecorner area is one of the important meeting points for girls and boys without their teacher's intervention. This place is dominated and regulated by girls. However, boys engage with girls' plays by performing certain roles like father, brother or pet. On the other hand, it is hard to claim that boys dominate the block area. It is shared by girls, as boys share the homecorner. This image evokes the idea that boys make their borders stronger and girls make less attempt to cross their territories. In other words, a girl entering boys' territory is more difficult than a boy entering girls' territory. Although girls sometimes refuse to let boys be involved in their play, boys' power over girls turns this refusal into a conflict. However, girls' 'sensitive-selfless' position leads them to avoid conflicts by accepting boys rather than resisting them. Boys know that girls accept them when they create the conflict; therefore, they do not stop themselves from entering their play or areas. Girls make less attempt to get into the boys' territory because they also know that boys can create conflict. Consequently, girls'

refusal to play with boys becomes more apparent; it is rare to see girls' attempts and boys' refusal. As can be seen from this argument these are complex relations that are interrelated with each other. Now I exemplify these complexities by looking at specific cases.

Esra from Nar knew that the boys' invisible and strong refusal would make it hard for her to be involved in their play. This knowledge led her to develop a strategy that opened a door into the boys' world. It is safe to say that she wanted to explore this world but maybe not because of her desire to perform other forms of masculinities or femininities; rather to break the lock of this door. I think this still means crossing boundaries because it creates something unusual and unpredictable. Esra had a strong character in the class and she played her emphasised femininity role perfectly, for example, by wearing feminine clothes and make-up, playing a mother role in the homecorner and having boyfriends. The strategy she used to join the boys' play was related to her boyfriend Uğur. Before explaining their relationship and Esra's strategy I would like to touch on the female sexuality issue, which is closely related to Esra's strategy. Female sexuality may give power to girls in gaining attention from others, particularly boys (Davies, 2003; Blaise, 2005, 2009). However, this power refers to being the 'object of masculine gaze' (Walkerdine, 1990). The point is here that some girls are aware that their sexuality can draw attention from boys, which normally they are not paid. My observations suggest that the girls liked to be watched when they moved, danced, spoke and sang in a sexualised way. Also the boys enjoyed being the audience for the girls' performances. For instance, one day Esra and Yağmur from Nar opened their t-shirts to show their shoulders and called Umut in a charming voice. When Umut saw the girls' shoulders, he opened his eyes wide and smiled. The girls then did the same thing again and Umut pretended to faint

this time by shouting ‘Vuuuww’. This incident shows children that female sexuality may have power over males.

Esra transformed her knowledge about her female sexuality into a tool to enter the area dominated by the boys. Uğur was an admirer of Esra. She knew she could impress him by holding hands, kissing, etc. As mentioned before, Uğur was the class president and teacher Fatma gave him many responsibilities like controlling the children’s work, and seating, etc.. He had powerful status in the class and Esra was aware of his power over everybody. Esra saw Uğur’s hegemonic masculinity as a key to entering the boys’ play. She could not be excluded or give up what she wanted to do under the safe arms of hegemonic masculinity. When she wanted to get involved in the boys’ play, she just needed to sit near to Uğur. As a result, Esra could get into the boys’ territory and even regulate the boys’ play in the block area as the extract below shows:

Uğur and Esra were sitting together on a chair their arms around their necks and shouted to the boys to what they needed to do: ‘bring blocks here, Kuzey, Cinar help to Kuzey’. It was like sultan and his powerful wife give orders to the folk. The assistant Elif abla looked at me with frightening eyes and said Esra knew her job.

(from field notes in Nar, 31 October 2013)

Madison, in Blaise’s study (2005), performs hegemonic masculinity by exerting her power over other girls and boys, but here Esra exerted her power over boys not by performing hegemonic masculinity but by staying near to it. In other words, she exerted power over the boys by performing emphasised femininity through female

sexuality. Although it is hard to suggest that without Uğur she could have been involved in or regulated the boys' play, it is safe to say that she had knowledge to control hegemonic masculinity, which gave her power by keeping Uğur near to her.

Similar to Esra's strategy, some boys used their hegemonic masculinity power to engage with feminine activities. However, unlike Esra's aim, they did not use this power to enter the homecorner or girls' play because they could already be part of it. It was difficult to negotiate with girls because of their domination in this area. If boys want to play in the homecorner, they have to follow girls' rules in general. The boys' problem was playing certain roles and performing certain tasks in the homecorner because girls did not let them have mother roles or give them feminine tasks to do. Their roles were clear; they drive, go to work and come home. They cannot look after children, clean the house or cook food. In addition to girls' refusal, there was a danger to be seen as a 'girl' because of engaging with feminine activities. Most boys would not like to put themselves in danger but this did not stop some of them from finding other ways to cross boundaries. Their strategy was to occupy the area and the toys by deporting the girls. Boys could occupy the girls' area by performing hegemonic masculinities but in order to perform femininities they needed to deport the girls from their territories. For instance, when the girls change place in their play, this might be a good time for the boys to move to the homecorner because it is better to play there when the girls are away, as Esma from Mavi mentioned in her interview.

Nehir : Do boys play in homecorner?

Esma: We sometimes change our place then they invade the homecorner.

Nehir: They invade?

Esma: They play there but when we are far. They cook for themselves.

(from the interview, 28 February, 2014)

Also, Aydın from Mavi mentioned in his interview how they made tricks to play in the homecorner. He had a dilemma that the homecorner was for girls but at the same time he thought that boys like to play there. Aydın's statement is a good example of the confusion of being in the girls' place as a boy. It seems that when they do not play with girls, it can be acceptable to be there because they can be still powerful, but if there are girls, they can be under the control of girls, which is worse than the first option.

Nehir: Do you play in the homecorner?

Aydın: Homecorner is for girls, what can a boy do there?

Nehir: You do not play there?

Aydın: Girls do not let us!

Nehir: But actually you want to play there?

Aydın: Yes, I want to. We make plans to play in homecorner.

Nehir: What kind of plans?

Aydın: For example, traps.

Nehir: Traps?

Aydın: Beating girls from their back and then confusing their minds but sometimes we cannot do traps.

Nehir: Why do you not play together instead?

Aydın: Because, it is not for boys.

Nehir: You think like that?

Aydın: I think homecorner is for boys as well. For instance, if a boy is single, he can cook his food by himself.

(from the interview, 25 February 2014)

Being a boy but wanting to play in the homecorner was a dilemma in Aydın's view. However, he and his friends preferred to play feminine roles and to do this they watched to occupy homecorner. At this point they understood that being a girl was not a condition for engaging with feminine tasks. As boys they can cook, clean or look after children. The male/female binary is overcome but under the safe arms of hegemonic masculinity. Once they occupy the area and toys, it is hard for the girls to take their place back because of possible conflict that hegemonic masculinity causes. Consequently, under the safe arms of hegemonic masculinity, boys stay and perform other ways of being a boy. I did not witness any boys' occupation mentioned above in Mavi but Egemen and Mehmet frequently occupied the girls' area in Nar. Egemen from Nar was an expert at using this strategy because he liked to play with kitchen toys. Mehmet did not have any specific interest in playing with dolls or kitchen toys or playing mother roles. He took the father or child role as he took the same roles in the girls' play. In other words Mehmet was not a gatekeeper of hegemonic

masculinity that can place a barrier on Egemen because he wanted to cross boundaries. It is safe to assume that may be therefore, they were friends. The occupation scenes are similar, as Aydın and Esma mentioned above. In order to get the kitchen toys Egemen and Mehmet observed the girls' place and at the first opportunity they took the toys. Then the girls realised the situation but rather than creating a conflict they tried to negotiate to share the toys. Hegemonic masculinity gave power to Egemen and Mehmet at that point because the girls did not want to create a conflict and accept their offers. As a result, under the safe arms of hegemonic masculinity, Egemen engaged with feminine activity and Nar and Mehmet played in the homecorner without being under the control of the girls. Once other boys joined Egemen and Mehmet's play they did not police Egemen because he wanted to be a mother. As Nida's friends knew about her interest in playing with Lego and blocks, other children were aware that Egemen liked to play with kitchen toys. As with Nida, Egemen took a risk and did not give up other ways of being by the help from Mehmet. He was not excluded or left alone like Nida since hegemonic masculinity offered more chance for him than for Nida.

4.5 Conclusion

Blaise's suggestion to apply Connell's (1987) hegemonic masculinities and emphasised femininity concepts to preschool settings is helpful in revealing the complex relationships in children's construction of gender identities in Nar and Mavi. It was found that these two forms of being are constructed through diverse ways by different actors. In the first part of this chapter, how two schools approach gender identities, and how girl and boy categories are constructed in the eyes of head teacher and assistant of head teacher, teachers, teacher assistants and preschool

settings were presented. Although it is hard to make clear the comparison between the two schools since they have many common practices, it is safe to say that Mavi gives more importance to gender equality than Nar. Nar is more silent about gender identities; gender separation is perpetuated and reproduced more than in Mavi.

Also I observed that teachers placed great importance on children's gender understandings. For example, while teacher Zehra's strategies weakened hegemonic masculinity, teacher Fatma's lack of intervention strengthened the unequal power relations in the classroom setting. Apparently, the teachers' approaches to gender were different and this shows that the teachers' initiatives carry importance in regulating gender relations in preschool settings. While it is difficult to draw clear implications for teaching training from only two cases, there is a lack of teacher education on gender and equity issues in Turkish teacher training institutions. Both teachers stated that they had not studied gender, neither in their bachelor studies nor in courses which the MoNE organises to train teachers. The only reference teachers gave in their interviews is the MoNE's gender neutral approach. There are still no compulsory modules in the curriculum of preschool teacher training courses in Turkey (Esen, 2013), which could help new teachers to understand the role of teachers in the formation of children's gender identities.

The children's views revealed that in the school context they felt more obligations to follow gendered roles. I think this is closely related to the nature of schools since children are obliged to follow their teachers, the school timetable, school rules and regulations. On the other hand, the children did not soak up what they were told. The findings show that they were aware of what their categories required them to be. The children themselves reproduced gendered relations in both

classrooms. Their awareness shows that they mostly preferred to stay within boundaries and they forced other children not to try other ways of being, but also their gender knowledge gave them a chance to develop strategies to cross boundaries. I found that it was easier to cross boundaries for boys than girls since hegemonic masculinity gives more power to them. In other words the ways of being different are difficult for girls. Some of them do not attempt to cross but rather stay within the circle of emphasised femininity or they prefer to cross but they stay in the safe arms of hegemonic masculinity. The ruler of hegemonic masculinity Uğur had more power over other children in Nar but in Mavi Bahadır did not exert power over other children as Uğur did because of teacher Zehra's intervention. Also the children in Nar tended to perform gendered positions more than the children in Mavi.

Chapter 5

National Identity

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of the Ministry of National Education is to raise all individuals for the Turkish Nation:

- 1. Who will be bound by the Atatürk reforms and principles of Atatürk Nationalism as set out in The Constitution of the Turkish Republic; who will internalise, develop and protect national, ethical, humanist, spiritual and cultural values of the Turkish nation; who will love their family, country and nation by glorifying them; who will know their duties and responsibilities towards the Turkish Republic which is a democratic, secular welfare state based on human rights and the first and main principles of the Constitution.*
- 2. Who will develop a character which has a balanced and healthy body, mind, morality, spirit and emotion; whose will has a free, scientific and international world view; who will respect the rights of individuals; who will feel responsible towards society; who will be creative, constructive and productive.*
- 3. By preparing them for life by improving their abilities and talents to learn science, skills and behaviours, to enable them to have a job that makes them, their families and society happy.*
- 4. By raising the peace and happiness of Turkish citizens and Turkish society on the one hand and supporting and facilitating economic, social and cultural progress in national unity and solidarity on the other; and at the end making the Turkish nation productive, creative and an integral part of modern civilization.*

(MoNE, 2013:9), Translated by author)

These are the main principles of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and all institutions tied to MoNE have to follow these principles. The first principle reveals how important Atatürk nationalism is in the creation of national identities by expecting all citizens to follow Atatürk's principles and reforms. Bora (2003) defines Atatürk nationalism as the official nationalism of Turkey that is being bound by the Atatürk reforms and principles regardless of people's religion, ethnicity and culture. As discussed in the contextualisation chapter, Turkish nationalism was 'converted' to Atatürk nationalism in 1982. From then on Atatürk nationalism has been acting as an umbrella term that encompasses Turks, Kurds, Lazes, Caucasians, Armenians, Alevi and other minority communities in Turkey. In the practice and policies of Mavi and Nar, children are expected to define their national identity through Atatürk nationalism. This chapter will explore and evince this.

In the previous chapter, I introduced the role of the schools and the children in the schools in the creation of gender categories. By focusing on complex power relations, I examined the role of children in maintaining and challenging gender boundaries. Unlike gender identities, national identities are presented clearly in the rules and regulations of MoNE. The gender neutral approach of MoNE does not require any specific effort from schools beyond seeing girls and boys as equal. National discourses, however, are represented clearly and all staff are obliged to follow them. Hence the agency of staff and children to interpret national discourses are restricted by top-down regulations. In order to discuss these obligations and the differing interpretations of these obligations, I will first briefly reintroduce some of the key studies that complement the findings that I present in this chapter. Then I will move on to discussing the role of staff, preschool settings and preschool curriculum in the construction of children's national identities. I will not specifically discuss the

ideas and approaches of teaching assistants, first because they are also required to follow MoNE's rules and regulations and second because national discourses around children tend to revolve around more formal practices. After exploring the national identities that are offered and propagated by Nar and Mavi, I will focus on children's engagement with these discourses by presenting their reproduction of dominant discourses and their taking up these discourses in different ways.

5.2 Constructing National Identities at Nar and Mavi

Anderson (2006:6) defines the nation as an imagined political community because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each resides the ideal of their communion. Anderson thinks one's feeling of national belonging is not created by any external mechanism but rather that it is imagined based on shared cultural systems. According to him, cultural systems - religion and kinship - are more important than political ideologies in shaping nationalities. Although Anderson's ideas do not explore how external mechanisms - for this study, schools - make imagined communities real to keep them alive, his imagined community concept is nonetheless useful to understand how national communities are created. On the other hand Gellner (2006) gives great importance to education systems in the creation of national identities. According to him, nationalism is the product of modern industrial society, not the product of the culture of an agrarian society:

A man's education is by far his most precious investment, and in effect confers his identity on him. Modern man is not loyal to a monarch or land or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture... a school-transmitted culture, not a folk-transmitted one, alone confers his usability and dignity and self-

respect on industrial man, is the fact that nothing else can do it for him to any comparable extent. (Gellner, 2006:35)

Agreeing with both Anderson's and Gellner's approach in terms of how they give importance to imagined and external mechanisms, Billig brings a new approach to the fore by claiming that national identities are formed in everyday life by small symbols and rituals. Billig (1995) defines this everyday formation as 'banal nationalism' through which individuals receive diverse messages that remind them of and reinforce their national identities. In this way, national identities are not created once or through particular ruptures such as crises, but rather, they are reproduced every day. He claims that 'waved and saluted flags' are not enough to remember national identities on special occasions; 'unwaved and unsaluted flags', for instance, flags in a state building, are important because they deliver national messages continuously. Billig likens the unwaved flag to a clock that you may not show any special interest in when it works, but when it stops you know it does not work.

Undoubtedly children engage with waved and unwaved flags in schools that remind them of national identities every day. At this point Billig's banal nationalism is helpful to understand what these symbols and rituals are. Despite this, Billig's approach does not explore individuals' relationship with banal nationalism. Hence Thompson (2001) points out the necessity of 'putting people back into nations' because some assumptions about nations and national identities separate individuals from their formation process. Thompson (2001:21) gives three assumptions: (1) that the world is divided into nations; (2) that national identities are conferred, rather than acquired; (3) that members of a nation share a common national character. These assumptions in studying nations and national identities do not involve individuals

and their choices by accepting one naturally belongs to a nation. Thompson also points out that the concept of a nation is not universal and that it is open to different understandings and interpretations. Hence Thompson (2001:28) offers local nationalism instead of banal nationalism:

Banal nationalism does not tell us how people actually, and often deliberately, work with concepts of nation to give order to the events they encounter or the relations in which they are involved. Individuals may not be conscious of how they are actively involved in giving life to national identities when they categorise, but they do use these categories to explain, position and make sense. They do not therefore view these categories as their own personal inventions, rather they view them as information that is available for them to use in order to make sense of the actions of others.

In the light of these studies the first part of this chapter focuses on the imagined communities of the staff, preschool curriculum and settings of Nar and Mavi. The findings show that MoNE aims to teach Atatürk nationalism as the official nationalism of the Turkish Republic (Bora, 2003). The staff of both schools had different interpretations of MoNE's imagined community that were sometimes similar and at other times different. These interpreted communities are represented in schools by diverse policies and practices that make the invisible bonds that maintain imagined communities more tangible. As citizens, children learn how to imagine their and others' communities in schools in relation to the discourses available to them. These embedded daily habits and special occasions take place at both Nar and Mavi to remind children who 'we' are and who 'they' are. The second part of this chapter aims to reveal how children engage with these discourses in the construction

of their national identities, and how they interpret and try to do their national identity right. Observation suggests that the children construct their national identities through the discourses of Atatürk nationalism. Other identities are restricted by these discourses. The children did not absorb and take on board all the messages they receive about national identity. This reminds us that children also create their own meanings.

5.2.1 Head Teachers and Assistants of Head Teachers

As previously discussed, Mavi applies rules and regulations of MoNE more stringently than Nar. Hence national discourses at Mavi are less interpreted and more directly implemented in line with MoNE policy. Mr. İsmail HT of Mavi stated that as in all other countries in the world, nationalism is an important component of the Turkish education system; he also added that extreme nationalist movements happen in Turkey just like they occur in other countries. Mr. İsmail felt the urge to defend Turkey by repeatedly comparing it to other countries. He also tended to present Turkey in a positive way. Perhaps this is due to me studying abroad and his potential perception that his speech may be reported to ‘them’ – the other. As the head teacher, it was evident that he feels responsible for representing ‘us’ based on MoNE’s rules and regulations. This was made clear through his use of the pronoun ‘we’. This reveals how Mr. İsmail has internalised his duty to raise citizens of the nation-state in a pivotal institution - a school. He referred to Atatürk nationalism as the dominant national discourse that children are taught in schools. He defined Atatürk nationalism as the ‘love of one’s country, love of humanity and love of the nation’. According to him, everybody in Turkey is an Atatürk nationalist. When I asked his opinion about the place of Atatürk nationalism in schools today, he said that Atatürk nationalism has not changed in schools and he thinks that ‘it is in people’s hearts in this country

and whatever they think, wherever they live because Atatürk nationalism is in their self'. Despite trying to challenge this comment by saying I know some people who do not support Atatürk nationalism in this country, he again pointed out that all the people in Turkey support Atatürk nationalism because according to him, 'Atatürk nationalism is loving this country'. Mr. İsmail's understanding of nationalism reveals how other ways of being are subsumed by Atatürk nationalism, as highlighted in the previous chapter. Mr İsmail's views about the representation of other nationalities in Turkish education system supports this claim:

Nehir: What place do other nationalities have in the Turkish education system?

Mr. İsmail: For other nationalities, there are special schools. Foreigner schools. If one cannot go to these schools, they can go to state schools where they have to follow the state schools' curriculum. In our country, there is no special curriculum for Jews or Christians. MoNE prepares the curriculum and everybody has to follow it.

(from the interview, 7 March 2014)

As Mr. İsmail stated, there are schools for other nationalities that are known as 'minority schools'. These schools accept students who are non-Turkish citizens but live in Turkey. This is an option for expatriates as long as these schools provide education that is not counter to Turkey's national, moral, humanist, ethic and cultural values as stated in MoNE's (2007a) law on minority schools. Mr. İsmail clarified that there is no alternative to following MoNE based education for other communities. 'Make the Other into the Same' (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) can be seen

from Mr. İsmail's perspective: there is no need to emphasise differences because we can all gather under the banner of Atatürk nationalism.

When I asked HTA of Mavi, Mrs. Deniz, about the role of the education system in developing national identities, she stated that there was no discrimination of other nationalities, races and religions in the education system. With regards to gender identity, she emphasised the equality of girls and boys. She was sensitive about following the main principles of MoNE, which she mentioned for both gender and national identities in schools. In further explanations she pointed to the place and importance of Turkish nationalism in history lessons. She also said that being Turkish is praised in these lessons but not in a way that discriminates against other nationalities. She believes that this praising of Turkishness is acceptable and normal since other nationalities are not discriminated against. However, when I asked her about how other communities are represented in schools, she laughed and asked me to change the question. This laughter can be read as a sign that she has doubts about the representations of others. Instead of choosing to express her opinions by using words, she chose to respond only with laughter. It is hard to interpret this laughter because first she stated that other nationalities are not discriminated against in the Turkish education system and then she did not want to talk about how they are represented. I think this contradiction is based on the clash between MoNE's imagined community and her imagined community. As an actor embedded in MoNE's institutional approach, she did not express the clash between the two imagined communities in words.

On the other hand, her views about Atatürk nationalism opened up a new issue related to recent changes in the Turkish education system. The current government

(The Justice and Development Party – AKP) has introduced a 4+4+4 education system, as mentioned earlier. The changes introduced include removing the student oath, and opening more religious schools (*İmam Hatip*) as discussed in the contextualisation chapter. These kinds of changes raise questions about the weakening of Atatürk nationalism in education and instead aligning religious identity more closely to Turkish national identity. According to Mrs. Deniz, Atatürk nationalism is losing its prominence as a result of these reforms. However, she said that she would rather not elaborate on this point. Despite this, it can be suggested that she does not like the idea of weakening Atatürk nationalism in schools. Her ideas about celebrating national holidays, which are important occasions for the performance of Atatürk nationalism, support this claim. According to her, national days are celebrated in Mavi with enthusiasm because without this enthusiasm they can become formal repetitions. She finds the celebration of national holidays important because according to her, not only do they create opportunities to share excitement for the nation but they are also an important means to teach and share a common history. For Mrs. Deniz national day celebrations should go further than repeating clichés because these days should work for children by enabling them to internalise a common history. She also gives importance to sharing these celebrations with the neighbourhood and says that national feelings evoke excitement for her:

Nehir: How are national holidays celebrated in Mavi?

Mrs. Deniz: We really enjoy the ceremonies. I also like very much the preparation process. In the fortnight or so preceding the holiday, we play music for the whole neighbourhood to hear. We have our rehearsals in the playground, which is always lovely. Everybody gets excited. Rather than the

national holiday itself, I like the preparations leading up to it because the children really enjoy it and they find it relaxing. The day itself can sometimes be quite stressful.

Nehir: What is the importance of national days?

Mrs. Deniz: They are our cultural heritage. We get distance when time passes. Children know Atatürk saved us from enemies and this is a cliché. When they celebrate, read poems, decorate the classrooms they then realise what it is all really about. Therefore, newcomers learn history as well. We need excitement to keep our history alive. Without excitement it is torture for the children.

(from the interview, 5 March 2014)

Based on the above it is safe to say that both head teacher and assistant of head teacher give importance to the discourses of Atatürk nationalism offered by MoNE and both also believe that children should learn about their national identities. It is clear that they appreciate the importance of not discriminating against others but they do not include or make space for minority groups. In this way, we can see the education system as being neither exclusive nor inclusive because although minorities are absent and rendered invisible, they are not (at least officially) discriminated against. As such neither of the head teacher and assistant of head teacher views the absence of minorities communities as stemming from exclusion.

On the other side, the HT of Nar Mr. Ahmet stated that the only nationalism that takes place in schools is Atatürk nationalism. He mentioned how Atatürk nationalism takes place on national day celebrations but he pointed out that preschoolers are too

young to engage with national day celebrations because national belonging refers to abstract concepts like nation and history that the children do not yet understand. Although preschoolers can attend Children's Day April 23rd and Republic Day 29th October ceremonies, according to him, these national holidays are only seen as opportunities to sing and dance by the children. In fact this study has found that some children absorb the discourses that surround these national holidays. This study reveals that preschoolers actively understand and reproduce national discourses that are available to them.

HTA of Nar Mr. Cemal defined two nationalist groups in Turkey: the 'Turkist radical nationalists' and the 'Kemalist nationalists', also known as 'Ulusalci'. According to Bora (2003), Turkist radical nationalism 'is a fascist ideology founded by the Turkist intelligentsia, which pursued the idea of the racist-ethnicist vein of Atatürk nationalism to its extreme' (ibid:445); Kemalist nationalism is the nationalistic (Ulusalçılık) discourse that neo-Kemalist movements acquired from the left-wing Kemalist discourse of the 1960s and 1970s. This is a version of ("Atatürkist") nationalism that claims to be left-wing (ibid:439). Mr. Cemal stated that both discourses were not found in Turkish education system but there were nonetheless hidden messages in textbooks, rules and regulations of MoNE in relation to these discourses.

According to Mr. Cemal, it is necessary to shed further light on the ideologies underlying the Turkish education system because for Mr. Cemal, Atatürk nationalism as the official nationalist discourse in the education system did not offer a clearly defined national identity to the children in the system. He stated that the new generation did not know enough about their national identity and that teachers need

to take on the responsibility of teaching nationalist identities. He also believed that MoNE's policies need to change because the system does not encourage children to think freely and in different ways. Moreover he thought that change is seen negatively in Turkey. He said that when the student oath was no longer compulsory, people overreacted but he thought that this reaction was unnecessary because nothing has really changed since. According to Mr. Cemal dominant national practices are symbolic and that students do not really understand what these practices mean. He stated in his interview (12 November 2013) that 'preparing for national holidays is a formal and repetitive obligation'. Furthermore he elaborated: 'the ceremonial practices of national holidays do not have any meaning and have limited contextualisation. In fact, sometimes students do not even realise what they are celebrating'. As a result for Mr. Cemal, the Turkish education system needs to change its practices and clarify its national values and beliefs. Otherwise, Mr Cemal argued, that national holidays and ceremonies will only ever 'produce fond memories of school days for students'.

All in all, the head teacher and assistant of head teacher at Mavi believe the place of Atatürk nationalism is pivotal for children to learn about their national identities. For them, there is no need to discuss other communities because following the principles and reforms of Atatürk effectively eliminate marginalisation and discrimination by emphasising the 'inclusiveness' of Atatürk nationalism. Hence MoNE's rules and regulations are followed closely. Beyond MoNE's requirements, both head teacher and assistant of head teacher at Mavi believe that these practices are important for teaching children the principles Atatürk nationalism. However, the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Nar do not take MoNE's policies about national identity as seriously as the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Mavi. For instance,

attendance of national day celebrations is not compulsory at Nar as decision taken through Mr Ahmet's own responsibility. Based on this we can argue that both head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Nar feel duty-bound to apply MoNE's rules but they did not voice opinions that suggest that they wholeheartedly agree with MoNE's approach.

5.2.2 Teachers

The ideas and approaches of teachers Fatma and Zehra about national identities differ from each other. While Turkish nationalism is more inclusive than Atatürk nationalism for teacher Fatma, for teacher Zehra, Atatürk nationalism should remain at the core of the education system. Therefore, although both teachers are obligated to follow the same programme, their classroom practices differ in terms of the place and importance they give to nationalist discourses. This finding reveals that there were different imagined communities within preschools based on the teachers' interpretations and that these differing interpretations play a role in the construction of children's national identities.

Teacher Fatma thought that Atatürk is the main figure of the education system and even subjects like science should be taught in relation to Atatürk. She said that this, however, was changing. According to her, being a nationalist meant loving and having stewardship over the country and respecting each other by keeping its traditions and customs. Hence she said she tried to teach children to respect each other. When I asked her how national discourses take place in the education system to convey these values and traditions, she stated there were not any practices therefore teachers should take responsibility:

Nehir: How are national identities given in the education system?

Teacher Fatma: Unfortunately, there are no practices about nationalism. But we make efforts by ourselves to maintain the importance of national values because teachers as people who drive progress must take up this mantle. To protect some national values, teachers have to make an effort. But some of ‘our’ teachers do not care about these things anymore. Nobody says why you are not doing this or that because there is no effort now. There are national celebrations like Republic Day but now it has been proposed that these celebrations are halted. They removed the T.C ¹⁹ (Turkish Republic abbreviation) symbol from school titles and they have removed the student oath. The student oath was what bound all schools all around the country together. It was a nationalistic thing but (she refers to the government) did they get rid of it? It motivated children to be honest, and hardworking? (these are rhetorical questions) Removing the oath hampers our national sentiments.

(from the interview, 13 November 2013)

She also claimed that national values are not given importance in Turkey because of ‘external powers’. Teacher Fatma sees other countries like the US, Armenia, England and France as a threat because they ‘play games on the Turkish nation’. According to her, Turkey has lost its power because of Americanisation and Turkish identity has disappeared because of the demand for integration with the European Union. Also she commented that ‘not just America (she means the US) but other countries are also trying to manage our country’s political issues because Turkey has an important geopolitical position’. Some studies also found that schools present Turkey’s geopolitical position as pivotal, by arguing that it receives significant attention from

¹⁹This abbreviation was used in titles of state institutions like T.C Health Department until 2013.

foreign powers (Çayır&Gürkaynak, 2008; Altınay, 2004; Kabapınar, 2005). She further explained that the ‘history books say that foreign powers could not beat Turkey after the War of Independence so they planned to defeat it slowly instead...They exercise power over the government’. According to her, the strategy followed by foreign powers to defeat Turkey, is slowly weakening Turkey’s national values by dividing it into groups such as religious and Kemalist. She stated that one day when she was talking about Atatürk, one child said, ‘It was not Atatürk, but Allah who saved us’; for her, this demonstrates the divisions created between Kemalism and religion. Based on this, she mainly emphasised Turkish nationalism rather as opposed to Atatürk nationalism because she thought Atatürk nationalism does not include religious people. Based on her understanding, Turkish nationalism needs to be protected in schools and not restricted to religious and Kemalist ideologies. Turkishness is important for teacher Fatma and she thought other communities should follow what the Turkish state offers and that if they choose not to, then they should leave the country:

They try to separate us. Our language is Turkish by laws. If we change it, do not talk about Turkish nationalism then. They can speak whichever language they want but they want to write it into the education system (she refers to Kurds and the Kurdish language), they (foreign powers) want to change the country’s system and structure. It’s dangerous. The country is called Turkey, why do they not find undiscovered soil instead of wanting a place in Turkey. The Turkish nation is a people who live on Turkish soil and it stems from the Ottoman Empire. There are all sorts of people, Armenian, Kurdish. It does not matter where you come from, the important thing is to look after your

country, and only if you do good things for your country can you talk about nationalism.

(from the interview, 13 November 2013)

Teacher Fatma thinks that external powers create an internal threat and this process weakens the power of Turkish identity. As such, she said she does not have any motivation to be a part of national celebrations any more. Contrary to HTA of Nar Mr. Cemal, Fatma thought that symbolic rituals are important for the awakening of national identities in children. Despite this, she stated she no longer has any feeling for her nation because ‘this country does not care about its citizens and people do not care about their country’. In other words, teacher Fatma’s imagined community and MoNE’s imagined community were not the same and she did not give a place to national discourses in her practice as required by MoNE.

Compared to Fatma, it is safe to say that teacher Zehra’s practices aimed to evoke national feelings through Atatürk. However, she started her conversation by saying that preschool education does not aim to offer and construct national identities because HT Mr. Ahmet thought preschoolers are too young to engage with abstract concepts. In further explanations she mentioned that children do engage with national symbols and practices. I think teacher Zehra believes that children engage with these symbols and practices but do not fully understand what they really mean because of their age. However, she was also aware that these practices still work to create national identities. She introduced national days and songs, poems about Atatürk and an International Day as classroom activities. She explained that during International Day Turkey and other communities are compared and introduced by their national cultures and values by (for example) wearing folkloric clothes or

talking about their languages. According to her, these were only classroom activities and that they do not contribute to national identity construction.

However, I think that all these activities she mentioned play a part in children's construction of national identities. For teacher Zehra, however, these activities are not enough for children to learn about their nation. In her opinion, the history of Turkey can be told to children through cartoons as it is in other countries because 'if we live in Turkey, children need to learn Turkey's history'. When I asked her about how children engage with the activities above she mentioned the children's knowledge of Atatürk, national celebrations, and flag ceremonies but her answer did not go towards explaining how children engage with these discourses:

I believe that they love Atatürk because they learn that he is the founder of Turkey. They also know that the 23rd April is Children's Day and that the 29th October Republic Day and also the anniversary of Atatürk's death. Every year, weather permitting, we go to Anıtkabir (Atatürk's mausoleum). Also, again weather permitting because they are small, the afternoon class attends the flag ceremony.

(from the interview, 12 March 2014)

In addition to the above, teacher Zehra answered the question about the importance of national values for her personally by pointing to her family's migration history. She stated that her family comes from Thessalonica²⁰ and that for her being human comes before everything. She pointed out there are people who come from different communities in Turkey and that she can be counted as one of them, but she thinks

²⁰Muslim citizens of the Ottoman Empire immigrated from the Balkans to Anatolia after Balkan Wars and World War 1.

the important point is that we all live in the same country, the Turkish Republic. Then she said there are no children who come from different nationalities in her classroom but this does not matter for her because ‘we have different cultures and that is it’. In line with this, we can say that much like the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Mavi, teacher Zehra believes that the point is to gather everyone under the common roof of Atatürk nationalism. In the next section I will discuss how Atatürk nationalism is the part of preschool curriculum and settings.

5.2.3 Preschool Settings and Programme

This section will engage with national discourses of preschool policies and practices based on MoNE’s rules and regulations. In order to do this, some symbols of nationhood, national days and national identities offered in the early years programme will be introduced to understand the messages of MoNE. It can be clearly stated that Atatürk nationalism is highly produced and reproduced by these national discourses. The reminders of Atatürk nationalism start the entrance of both Nar and Mavi. As a classic image of Turkish primary schools, a flagpole and Atatürk’s statue in front of the school building is the first thing that welcomes you (see Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 In front of Mavi

Every public school has to have this image in Turkey. This area is important because rituals and celebrations take place in front of the flag-pole and Atatürk's statue. Every Monday and Friday, each class lines up outside and sing the first two parts of the national anthem. This ceremony is called the flag ceremony. There are strict sets of guidelines on how the flag ceremony should be conducted. This includes the ceremony being compulsory as well as the precise way in which students should raise the flag during the ceremony (MoNE, 2007). It can therefore be argued that the flag ceremony is a key practice used in schools to remind children to their national identities as the lyrics of anthem reveal:

*Fear not! For the crimson flag that proudly ripples in this glorious twilight,
shall never fade, before the last fiery hearth that is ablaze within my nation is*

extinguished. For that is the star of my nation and it will forever shine; it is mine; and solely belongs to my valiant nation.

*Frown not, I beseech you, oh thou coy crescent, but smile upon my heroic race! Why the anger, why the rage? Our blood which we shed for you might not be worthy otherwise; for freedom is the absolute right of my God-worshipping nation.*²¹

The national anthem, entitled ‘Independence March’ was written by Mehmet Akif Ersoy after 1921. It has 11 parts but only the first two parts are performed in ceremonies. These first two parts are written as dialogue with the Turkish flag. It says that the Turkish flag will never fade and the Turkish state will be alive forever. That the Turkish nation will not be seized until the last person dies upon its soil and the Turkish flag, as a symbol of independence, will show this power. The second part calls the flag not to fade by referring to the strife the nation experienced at the end of the First World War, because if the flag fades, the blood that was shed for the flag will be in vain. The march finishes by saying god-fearing people of the country deserve independence. These verses strongly underline war, the nation, and the flag as concepts and mainly emphasise the difficulties experienced in creating the nation. It does not mention Atatürk specifically; in fact the march is more about the Turkish nation than it is about the Turkish republic that Atatürk founded. It also involves religious references as a component of Turkish identity. One may think it may be hard for young children to understand what these lyrics mean. In my lower secondary school years, however, we studied all 11 verses and their meanings each year. In

²¹Source: <http://www.nationalanthems.me/turkey-istiklal-marsi/>, accessed in March 2015.

other words, MoNE do not only want students to sing some parts but also to understand and internalise its meanings.

Undoubtedly singing these verses twice a week whilst looking at the Turkish flag remind children of their national identities. Although it is not compulsory for preschoolers to attend flag ceremonies, they do sometimes join in. When I asked both teachers about the flag ceremony in their interviews, Fatma pointed out that it is not compulsory for preschool classes to attend the flag ceremony at Nar; teacher Zehra mentioned that she sometimes takes children to the flag ceremony if the weather is good. Compared to Fatma, Zehra places greater importance on flag ceremony attendance. She explained that if she has a morning classroom²², it is difficult to gather children and line up outside for the Monday morning ceremony but if she had an afternoon class they could sometimes attend the Friday ceremony. In other words, for Zehra attending this ceremony firstly depends on her class time. She also said that it was good for children to see what they could do in their later years in school and it was good to sing the national anthem with the whole school. According to her, this kind of ceremony is good for national sovereignty and creates a good feeling.

There is an Atatürk corner, which was introduced in Chapter 4, as another reminder of Atatürk nationalism at the entrance of every school and inside each classroom (MoNE, 2014). As preschool classrooms do not have the traditional blackboard and traditional seating settings, the Atatürk corner can be placed elsewhere. However, it must always be placed high up on the wall. While it is located above the lockers at

²² School attendance is staggered with one set of students attending school in the early morning through to lunch time and the other from the early afternoon through to the early evening. In this way a single school is able to double its capacity.

Nar, it is on the empty wall at Mavi due to the others being occupied by lockers, and boards. There is also another Atatürk corner that every classroom in Turkey must have. One board in every classroom is assigned for this display where pictures of Atatürk and his family are hung. Teachers prepare this display and are expected to regularly update it. In other words, MoNE wants teachers to renew this corner so children engage in diverse pictures of Atatürk and his life. The detailed rules about the corner reveal the sacred place of Atatürk and the Turkish flag as national symbols. This will be returned to in a later section.

In addition to these symbols, how schools offer national identities can be observed in national day celebrations. For Zembylas (2013) national ceremonies offer alternative ways of seeing other nationalities and in particular offer a way to see ‘others’ in a negative light. In this study it is clear that they work to produce hegemonic stories rather than offering alternative ways of being. First of all the national day ceremonies that preschool classes attend differ from the ceremonies that primary schools attend because preschool children are seen incompetent and too young to understand the meaning of the ceremonies they do not attend. In the early years education programme the national days are 23rd April National Sovereignty and Children’s Day, 29th October Republic Day and the anniversary of Atatürk’s death on the 10th November (MoNE, 2013:84). In addition to these primary schools have other days like 19th May Commemoration of Atatürk Youth and Sports Day or 18th March Çanakkale Victory and Martyr’s Day. In the following sections I will provide details for the 29th October and 10th November national holidays and discuss children’s engagements with them. Although it is compulsory for teachers and students to attend these ceremonies according to MoNE’s law for ceremonies (MoNE, 2007), the way head teachers and assistant of head teachers and teachers view national days

influences the flexibility of the schools. It was found that the head teacher and assistant head teacher and teacher of Nar are more flexible than the head teacher and assistant head teacher and teacher of Mavi to control attendance of these ceremonies. It should also be noted that some significant days in Turkey's national history like the anniversary of Ankara becoming the capital city or celebrating Atatürk first visit to Ankara as a statesperson can be added to this list based on the teachers' initiative.

National days are not just celebrated on one day; there are also classroom activities designed to improve the understanding, meaning and importance of the day amongst pupils. To provide an example, I will draw from an Early Year's Activity Book () (MoNE, 2013a:38-39), which offers an activity for national days, *Atatürk with Pictures*. This example shows what MoNE expects from teachers for preparing activities about the national days or Atatürk. The aims of the Atatürk with Pictures activity are centred on children's cognitive, language and social-emotional development. Despite the developmental approach having a universal character, the preschool programme (2013) made local additions by involving Atatürk in cognitive and social-emotional development areas:

Cognitive Development

Aim 21: *The child can identify Atatürk and knows his importance for Turkish society.*

Indicators: *The child is expected to recall Atatürk's important life events and his personality traits; they are expected to know that Atatürk is a precious person. The child knows about Atatürk's reforms and their importance for the nation.*

Description: *The activities for this aim should be simplified according to the age of children. The birth place of Atatürk; the names of his mother and father; the name of his commander; his career as a soldier; his love of children; his presentation of the 23rd of April as the day of children can be presented using stories, drama, books, films and documentaries in order to achieve the aim of the lesson.*

(MoNE, 2013:23)

Social-Emotional Development

Aim 11: *The child is willing to take responsibility in activities related to Atatürk.*

Indicators: *The child joins in activities related to Atatürk. S/he expresses her/his feelings and thoughts about Atatürk through different activities.*

Description: *The environment should be arranged according to the age of children, in order to enable them to join activities. Children should be given opportunities to express their feelings.*

(MoNE, 2013:29, Translated by author)

I suggest that these aims reveal that MoNE expects children to internalise their relation with Atatürk. Children need to have knowledge about Atatürk and his reforms, but more importantly, in line with aim 11, they also need to be enthusiastic to learn about him. According to the activity, children bring photos of Atatürk from home and then they talk about these photos to find differences and similarities between them, who is in these photos and what they do and what Atatürk does. Then,

the activity requires the teacher to read out a poem entitled Atatürk. In this poem first the family of Atatürk is introduced then this important point is introduced: ‘While my country was under threat, Atatürk founded the Republic and Turkey became free...You (Atatürk) are both soldier and teacher. I thank you, Atatürk, for everything’. I describe this as an important point because this part of the poem reminds the children that Atatürk fought with enemies and founded the country and the children should be thankful to Atatürk for being alive today. From early ages children are reminded that they have a debt to pay and that the way of repaying this debt is by being hardworking and following Atatürk’s reforms and principles. To encourage children to be hardworking, they are reminded of this debt through the figure of Atatürk.

The activity continues with the teacher asking questions after the poem about Atatürk and his family, such as who was Atatürk’s mother? What has he done in the past? Children are also expected to complete some sentences to develop their knowledge about Atatürk. This is achieved through ‘call and repeat’ activities such as the teacher saying ‘Zübeyde Hanım’ and waiting for the class to respond: ‘is Atatürk’s mother’. Children memorise these kinds of sentences and they use them to explain their ideas about Atatürk. At the final stage, children group a set of photos of Atatürk’s family and Atatürk’s reforms and they stick photos to cardboard and decorate them with craft paper. In the assessment of the activity the teacher asks what the photos say about Atatürk, which photos the children like and where the children can see Atatürk’s photo. There is also the suggestion that children involve their families in the activity; the teacher can choose to send children home with a picture of Atatürk along with a small cartoon that the child can complete at home with children’s family along with other pictures. Not just students but families are

also asked to engage with hegemonic discourses. Lastly, there is one more part in the lesson plan that outlines a simplified version of the lesson for children with learning difficulties or mental illness. In this way, the preschool Atatürk activity is seen as ensuring that no student misses out on forging a relationship with Atatürk.

Both teachers stated that they do not use this activity book in their practices because they found it easier to use online resources and their memorised activities. Whether they use activities from the book or not, all activities are expected to be based on the same aims and the national day ceremonies that all preschoolers attend are consequently tied to the knowledge of Atatürk that they have developed in class. As can be seen from the above discussion it was found that discourses in the programme relate to being a citizen of the country that Atatürk founded. Although in the literature scholars highlight how being Turkish is praised in textbooks and curriculum of primary and secondary schools (Çayır&Gürkaynak, 2008; Kancı, 2009), this study has not uncovered a discourse that specifically praises Turkishness in the preschool programme.

There is only one part in which other nationalities are given place in the programme. This part (MoNE, 2013) emphasises the importance of respecting other countries' cultures and values in the social-emotional development area. This provides a clue as to how other nationalities are seen in the preschool curriculum. Based on this aim, children are expected to know their own culture before they can begin to understand other cultures. It is offered that some activities can be planned by using tools like flags, food and money to learn about their own and other people's cultures; however, no activities relating to this aim were found in the EYAB (2013a).

Social-emotional development

Gain 9: *The child is expected to explore different cultures.*

Indicators: *The child is expected to talk about the culture of her/his own country. The child should compare the differences and similarities between their own culture and others. S/he is expected to say that each culture is unique.*

Description: *Children are first introduced to their own culture and then to other cultures in order to reach this target. For example, the idea that each country is represented by their nation's own flag and then the national flag can be introduced and explored. The national days, food, clothes, music, toys, plays, dances and currency of their own cultures can be introduced using diverse activities. Then other cultures can be presented with similar activities. In addition to this, it should be emphasised that there are also similar values that different cultures share.*

(MoNE, 2013a:29), Translated by author)

This aim can be used at the International Children's Day (first Monday of October), which is listed as an important day in the programme. Teacher Zehra mentioned in her interview that she uses this day to teach children about other cultures around the world. The interesting point here is that different cultures and communities who live in Turkey are mentioned in this but rather other countries like Germany, Japan or China are the focus of the activity. For instance, in Lappalainen's (2006) study International week in Finnish preschools was celebrated by introducing different communities in Finland. Even some immigrant parents were invited to share their

culture with preschoolers. According to Lappalainen, most of the time other communities and in particular non-Europeans in the Finnish context are marginalised in these kind of activities. She discusses how other communities are heard for one or two weeks in the school year as a part of this activity but for the rest of the year they are supposed to follow hegemonic discourses. In this study, much like in Lappalainen's study, it is clear that others (albeit others who do not live in Turkey) are represented for a day or two as a part of the set of activities built around International Day. However, it is not possible to find any discourse related to different communities like the Kurds, Lazes, Armenians or Alevis that live in Turkey in preschool curriculum and practices. This study found that there are two ways of representing other communities in early years' settings: one is by merely mentioning others on International Day and the other is the enemy that Atatürk fought with. In preschools, the second category does not refer to any countries or communities. Older children, however, learn about the identity of these enemies in citizenship and history classes (Ince, 2012). Others as enemies are presented in poems such as the poem 'Atatürk' above, in songs and in the speech of teachers. Consequently, as the next sections will argue, children using these discourses construct the other as an enemy.

5.3 Local Nationalism at Nar and Mavi

The previous sections focused on teachers' and head teachers and their assistants' imagined communities. The rules and regulations of MoNE were also introduced to see how national discourses take place in the preschool settings and in the programme. This section will present my findings about children's engagement with national discourses at Nar and Mavi. I mainly draw from interviews with children in

order to discuss these issues. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify some points that may have influenced the children's comments and observations in interviews.

I used different materials such as the Turkish flag, pictures of the Turkish flag and pictures of Atatürk to initiate conversation with the children I interviewed. I suggest that these materials reminded the children of their obligations in school, and most of them urgently felt the need to give me the 'right' answers. It can be said that the hierarchic nature of school (Hill, 2006) and its expectations from students to produce a certain knowledge set (Apple, 2001) may create this urgency. In the methodology chapter it was mentioned that Thorne (1993) realises that her usage of 'behaving' and 'doing' words lead to children giving defensive responses because these words remind them of adults' control over them. Similarly, Kurban and Tobin (2009) found similar situations with Turkish children in a German preschool, when they researched the integration and exclusion of immigrants in preschools in Europe and the USA. The children in their study realised what the researchers wanted them to say and they performed the desired roles by exaggerating their exclusion. What Kurban and Tobin (2009) discovered was that the children performed in order to gain their friends' attention as well as to fulfil the researchers' expectations. In my research, the materials (the flag and Atatürk) and the questions about these objects reminded the children that they should present their national identities correctly. For instance, when I asked children what they thought of Atatürk, I observed that some of them felt that they should praise Atatürk by explaining what he had done for this nation. In order to deal with this situation, talking about situations out of the school context was helpful to lessen the children's sense of obligation to give 'right' answers. Asking about their engagement and experiences with the Turkish flag and

Atatürk outside the school context gave some children space to share their ideas in a more flexible way. In addition to this, I used some pictures where Atatürk and the Turkish flag were visible but not the main focus, for example, a picture of a shopping mall which had the flag in front of it. Hence initiating the conversation by discussing the picture in general before addressing the issue was the strategy which kept the children's minds away from trying to give the researcher what they thought she wanted to hear.

Although this strategy worked sometimes, it is safe to say that most of the children felt it necessary to repeat school discourses. This situation emphasises the important finding that the children at Nar and Mavi feel obliged to reproduce MoNE's and teachers' imagined communities. In this way, the children feel obliged to recreate the hegemonic discourses of Atatürk nationalism in their conversation. While the children at Mavi tended to give me more 'right' answers by reading a poem or singing a song that they learned in class, the children at Nar also used dominant national discourses that are propagated by MoNE policies and practices. However, the children at Nar had less knowledge about dominant discourses in comparison to the children at Mavi. On the other hand, it was also found that the children did not always follow the dominant discourses that they were given. They engaged with these discourses in a way that was often out of context: sometimes seeing them as funny activities; or based on their personal experiences; or by creating their own meanings which will be detailed in the following. Children's construction of national identities through banal nationalism will be argued in two parts: (i) unwaved and (ii) waved flags, in the following section.

5.3.1 The Children's Unwaved and Unsaluted Flags

National symbols are important reminders of national identities and in this section I will discuss unwaved flags at Nar and Mavi. Billig (1995:41) explains the role of unwaved flags as follows:

They are providing banal reminders of nationhood: they are 'flagging' it unflaggingly. The reminding, involved in the routine business of flagging, is not a conscious activity; it differs from the collective rememberings of a commemoration. The remembering is mindless, occurring as other activities are being consciously engaged in.

In line with Billig's definition, I chose two reminders of national identity: the Turkish flag and Atatürk as national symbols. I found that these symbols carry importance in the children's performance of national identity and that it is therefore important to understand how children perceive unwaved flags in relation to these discourses. I will first focus on the children's views about the flag of Turkey since they see and engage with this national symbol every day. Then I will examine how children perceive Atatürk. This will be explored using Atatürk's corner in classrooms and songs as well as the poems about him that the children cite and sing.

5.3.1.1 The Turkish Flag

What the Turkish flag evokes in children, as the national symbol of the country will be discussed in this section. As mentioned earlier the framed Turkish flag as an unwaved flag is on display on the walls of Nar and Mavi as a part of Atatürk corner. There are also many other Turkish flags: at the entrance of school, in the school's Atatürk corner, and on display boards throughout the school. In the children's

interviews, when we talked about the Turkish flag, I asked questions like ‘What does this flag remind you of?’, ‘Have you seen this flag before?’, ‘Where have you seen it?’, ‘Why do you think this flag is hung on the walls in your classroom?’ I used these questions to see how they perceive the unwaved flag.

First of all, most of the children at Mavi were aware of the Turkish flag in their classroom. Some even mentioned that the flag is not just in their classroom but is on display throughout the school. On the other hand, at Nar nearly half of the children did not know that there was a flag in their classroom. This difference between the two groups can be seen as correlating with the positioning of the Atatürk corner in each class and with the teachers’ individual practices. The location of Atatürk corner in Nar is very high on the wall (see Figure 5.2); it is just above the lockers and the children mostly did not engage with this part of the classroom. The flag is also in a small frame. At Mavi however, the flag is hung on a blank wall and in a large frame (see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.2: Atatürk Corner in Nar



Figure 5.3 Atatürk Corner in Mavi



Undoubtedly the location and size of the flag influence the way in which children engage with unwaved flags but what is more influential was the way teacher Zehra used this corner as a reference point in her teaching practice. For instance, when the children sang a song about Atatürk, she pointed the picture of Atatürk which is located just under the framed flag. Therefore there are more chances that the children at Mavi engage with the unwaved flag than in Nar since teacher Fatma does not refer to this corner in her practice as often as teacher Zehra. However, there were still some children who stated there is no Turkish flag at all in their class at Mavi. This finding is important because it shows that unwaved flag is not ‘flagging’ for some children. Although it is hung on the wall to remind children of their national identity, some children have not realised the flag. Hence, unwaved flags do not remind all individuals of their national identity but only some. However, the findings I present here are not sufficient to identify what underlies the difference between the children who notice the flag in their classroom and those who do not.

In both classes, what the Turkish flag reminded children of the most was Atatürk. When I began the discussion of the flag in the interviews I conducted, I put the pictures I had of Atatürk away so as not to highlight or encourage children to emphasise the link between the Turkish flag and Atatürk in their responses. Despite this, most of the children in both classes called Turkish flag ‘Atatürk’s flag’. When I asked them why they called this flag Atatürk’s flag for instance, Mert from Nar said ‘because Atatürk did everything for us’, Ozan from Nar said ‘we were scared but Atatürk came and we were not afraid any more because he gave us this flag’, Melike from Mavi said ‘because Atatürk protects us from our enemies’. These were the

responses most commonly found among the children who equated the Turkish flag with Atatürk. In addition, the Turkish flag reminded the children of national day celebrations since the Turkish flag is particularly visible both in school and out of school on these days. Despite this, the children at Nar tended to refer to Republic Day more frequently whereas the children at Mavi tended to refer to the Anniversary of Atatürk's death more frequently. This is largely because of the dates on which I conducted my interviews. This is evident from my discussions with Azra from Nar and Koray from Mavi:

Nehir: What does this flag remind you of?

Azra: It's the republic's flag. We have the same flag in our complex near the basketball pitch. Where we live, the neighbours hang this flag.

Nehir: Why do they hang this flag?

Azra: Because of Republic Day.

Nehir: What is Republic Day for?

Azra: For Atatürk's festival.

(from the interview, 4 November 2013)

Koray: Atatürk's flag.

Nehir: What does it remind you of?

Koray: Atatürk's ancestors' flag. They put this flag everywhere because Atatürk is dead. People put this out and we remember that he is dead.

(from the interview, 28 February 2014)

It was not surprising to hear the flag of Turkey being described as Atatürk's flag since Turkey is always presented as a country that Atatürk established. Particularly in preschools there is only one activity on International Day in which Turkey is introduced as a country independent from Atatürk. Moreover, there are no maps of the world or of Turkey in either classroom that make the abstract concept of a nation tangible. As a consequence, most of the children have limited knowledge about Turkey and other countries. I asked the children whether they know about any other countries when we talked about Turkey and the answers show that not many children knew the differences between Turkey, the cities of Turkey and other countries. This is evident from my interviews with Serdar from Mavi and Ömer from Nar:

Nehir: Which country do you live in?

Serdar: Ankara? (asking me, then he was sure by saying Ankara) Ankara.

Nehir: Do you know any other countries?

Serdar: Antalya (a city in the south of Turkey).

(from the interview, 25 February 2014)

Nehir: Which country do you live in?

Ömer: Turkey.

Nehir: Do you know any other countries?

Ömer: Batman (a city in the southeast of Turkey where his family come from), Istanbul (Turkey's biggest city), America, Ankara.

(from the interview, 12 November 2013)

Most of the children understand 'country' to refer to where they live and they understand other countries as places that they visit. There were however, some children who knew that Turkey is a country and listed other countries such as China, Russia and England. Children's personal experiences play a part in their knowledge about other countries (Hengst, 1997). When I asked about the differences between these places, some of the children pointed to language differences as being markers of other countries. For instance, Zeynep from Mavi said that she has an uncle who lives in Russia and she explained that people speak Russian there. Similarly Cağan from Mavi stated that his father speaks English and he knows that some people in the world speak English. Ayşesu from Nar also said that 'other countries are different because they speak other languages. When we took my granddad to the airport, they spoke a different language'. Yağmur from Nar also points out language differences but rather than different languages in different countries she spoke about her grandmother's accent. Howard and Gill (2001) found that the children in their study saw the Australian accent as an important factor in being Australian. For Yağmur however, language differences do not refer to being Turkish but to living in Ankara and Tire, a village of Izmir:

Nehir: Which country do you live in?

Yağmur: Ankara

Nehir: Do you know any other countries?

Yağmur: Izmir

Nehir: What is the difference between them?

Yağmur: I have a grandmother in Tire and she speaks a bit different language. People only speak like my grandmother in Tire, nobody speaks like she does in Ankara.

(from the interview, 12 November 2013)

As can be seen from above examples there is a close relationship between people and places they live in. In other words what makes places different is people who live in these places for some children. Scourfield et al. (2006:5) found that children tend to see place primarily in terms of people and categorisation of people.

The Turkish flag is not just a national symbol but it also bears political significance. Mustafa from Mavi and Uğur from Nar raised the political meaning of the flag because it reminded them both of demonstrations. The unwaved flag reminds children of the occasions that the flag waves. Some children remembered national ceremonies and Mustafa and Uğur remembered the flagging flag from protests and social movements. From what the children said, it can be assumed that these demonstrations were organised by people who support Kemalist ideas and oppose the current AKP government. They mentioned that people used forks and pans as a way to express what they were feeling about the government. Both children also mentioned Atatürk with regard to these demonstrations. The tension the children mentioned here is about being Kemalist and being against Atatürk but it does not particularly refer to the conflict between secular and religious groups.

Nehir: What does this remind you of?

Mustafa: It can be used in demonstrations.

Nehir: Demonstrations?

Mustafa: They can also play music. They can play with forks, pans. They can use Atatürk's flag in demonstrations. I wish Atatürk were alive today, don't you? Because Atatürk can rescue us from our enemies. I wish he, Atatürk, wasn't dead. Once we went to a demonstration and one woman flapped a flag like this (he flapped the flag passionately).

(from the interview, 4 March 2014)

Nehir: Have you seen this flag in any other places?

Uğur: My brothers gathered... All men got together and shouted 'Atatürk, Atatürk'. Everybody gathered and shouted.

Nehir: You saw this flag in this demonstration?

Uğur: No, bigger than this and some had Atatürk's picture on it.

(from the interview, 11 November 2013)

In addition to children's perceptions of the Turkish flag, I would like to return to the subject of the flag ceremonies I observed at Nar. As discussed earlier, despite preschool classes not being obliged to attend the flag ceremony, preschoolers do sometimes participate; especially if the flag ceremony is held indoors on very cold days, when the national anthem played out from a sound system to the whole school.

However, this again depends on the start and finish times of preschool classes and other levels of school. For instance, while the starting time at Nar was similar to other year groups, at Mavi, other year groups started school earlier than the preschool class. As a result, I only had a chance to observe the morning ceremony at Nar.

I want to mention two events that happened during the flag ceremony at Nar. Uğur took a leading role in both events. The first event involved Uğur and Bilal and their impassioned performance during the ceremony and the second involved Uğur and Umut singing the national anthem in their free time. In the first incident, the children took part in the morning ceremony when they heard the anthem being played around the school sound system. The flag ceremony happens first thing in the morning. Standing still and singing the national anthem tends to be a reflex action for most children. On one Monday morning, as soon as the children heard the anthem played, they instantly became aware of what it was they needed to do. Uğur and Bilal seemed very passionate and tried to sing the national anthem whilst standing very still. This happened whilst the other children merely stood very still and watched the performance of Uğur and Bilal:

I had just arrived in class and there were only a few children: Uğur, Cansu, Can, Ozan and Barkın. While Elif Abı was welcoming Bilal at the door, the national anthem started to play. All of us stood up quickly because we have to. Uğur started to sing the anthem very loudly. He was in a very serious position which as the teacher's right-hand pupil he was definitely fulfilling his role. He only knew some of the words. Bilal joined him with enthusiasm

but did not know the words either. They looked at each other when they sang and the others watched their performance silently.

(from the field diary in Nar, 1 November 2013)

While Bilal and Uğur were doing their national identity right, they were also setting an example for the other children. They know in advance what they will have to do when they start primary school. Therefore, preschoolers do not police each other to perform certain forms of national identity as they do with their gender identity. In other words, borders are not strictly controlled by the children whereas gender boundaries are.

The second event of note was the manipulation of a serious and sombre national discourse through play. In the above, the national anthem was seen by Uğur as a serious matter to be performed as respectfully as possible. In the second event, however, Uğur began to sing the national anthem spontaneously during playtime. As he tried to remember the lyrics, Umut joined in and they started to alter the lyrics and shout loudly. In this instance, the anthem for Uğur is not at all serious but rather a fun song that he sings with his friend. Despite this, they know under which conditions they are expected to sing the national anthem. Umut also knows what the national anthem is and calls it Atatürk's song:

Nehir: Do you know who is this (pointing to Atatürk's picture)?

Umut: Mustafa Kemal.

Nehir: Where do you know him from?

Umut: From students.

Nehir: What do you know about him?

Umut: I do not know Atatürk's song. (He means the national anthem)

Nehir: Atatürk's song?

Umut: Yes, I love it but Özgür (a friend from outside school) also cannot sing it. Not all children can remember it, just big children.

...

Nehir: Why do you think this song is sung in schools?

Umut: Because Atatürk was one year old and then he was two years old and then he got bigger and bigger and rescued us from our enemies.

Nehir: Who are the enemies?

Umut: Errrrr.. bad people from an island?

Nehir: What did he do?

Umut: When Atatürk died, the war started. Then, when a commander died, one soldier took him to the hospital and then they fought. Atatürk sent tanks and bomb cars then they beat all of them.

Nehir: Then?

Umut: Then when Atatürk sent the tanks and stuff, the enemies sent a plane. The plane fired at a guy.

Nehir: Fired?

Umut: It fired three shots and he died.

Nehir: It sounds scary.

Umut: When Atatürk died, soldiers started to fight. Then children, students who do not know Atatürk remember him by singing his song.

(from the interview, 31 October 2013)

The first thing Umut mentioned about Atatürk was the national anthem and according to him, this anthem is made for us to remember Atatürk and how he fought for ‘us’. He wants to memorise the lyrics but he knows it is acceptable if he does not know them yet since he is a preschooler. He also knows singing the national anthem is necessary to do his national identity right aim to prepare preschoolers to do primary school work. It is all right to sing the national anthem as an ordinary song in preschool however, they are aware that it will be different when they start primary school since the rules and regulations become more strict. This reveals the fluidity of meanings and more importantly, by performing the national anthem every week, children get accustomed to and normalise the national practices around them.

5.3.2 The Gaze of Atatürk

This study found that Atatürk is the most important figure of banal nationhood at Nar and Mavi. His pictures, songs and poems about him remind children of their national identities everyday as for them, Turkey is a country founded by Atatürk. Undoubtedly, as an unwaved flag Atatürk’s picture right in the middle of other frames in Atatürk corner can be seen as a distinct reminder. It symbolises the gaze of Atatürk over the classroom. Elmas (2007) points out that children engage with this portrait when they hear about Atatürk in lessons. When she conducted a survey in the

classroom to research students' views about Atatürk, she observed that students looked at the portrait to confirm their answers. As with Elmas, in this study there were some occasions when the children interacted with the portrait of Atatürk. At Mavi in particular (where as mentioned Zehra uses Atatürk corner as a reference point), children always point to the portrait whenever they sing a song or read a poem about Atatürk. However, as with the Turkish flag, the picture of Atatürk does not act as a flag for some children. While some children were aware of the gaze of Atatürk, some children in both classes stated that there were no pictures of Atatürk in their classrooms. This reveals that the children may not see this gaze even though their teacher shows or they may point to the picture when they sing because all of their peers and teachers point to the same place (the front of the class). Although it is clear that some children point towards this picture to do their national identities right, it is hard to claim that this is the case for others. It seems that some children have more concern with doing their student identity right by following teacher and peers.

Certainly the classroom is not the only place in which Atatürk 'gazes' at the children because as Aydın from Mavi said they can see Atatürk everywhere. It is not difficult to come up with pictures of Atatürk since it is an obligation to have them in state buildings like schools, hospitals, councils, etc. Not just in state buildings either, as his portrait can be displayed on cars, in shop windows and in people's houses. This demonstrates how pictures of Atatürk are used as symbols in daily life. Children can engage with the symbolic usage of Atatürk's pictures on different occasions. For instance, Ayşe from Nar encountered it in a public toilet and as Uğur from Nar reported, his brothers and many people gathered together and carried Atatürk's picture at a demonstration. Children also bring these experiences to the classroom. In

other words, other unwaved flags outside the classroom influence the way children see unwaved flags in the classroom.

The children who were aware of Atatürk's portrait in their classroom were asked their opinions on why his portrait is placed in their classroom. The children gave four possible answers (1) Atatürk is dead, (2) we love him, (3) Atatürk rescued us from the enemies, (4) I do not know. Although some children do not know why this portrait is placed in the classroom, it appears that other answers do not contradict with the aims of MoNE, which is to remind children of Atatürk. There were no negative tones in the children's answers with regards to the portrait; the majority of responses were neutral and 'I don't know' and 'I don't feel like talking'. The children who did not want to talk about Atatürk perhaps remember the weight of their responsibilities in school because Atatürk is always represented as a reminder of children's debt to their nation (as mentioned Atatürk poem in MoNE's practice book). In Elmas's (2007) study, a student stated that when she does not do her homework, Atatürk looks angry but if she does well in class, the portrait of Atatürk smiles at her. Similarly, when we talked about Atatürk, Sevda from Nar reminded herself that she needs to work harder because students are always reminded to study hard because Atatürk wanted them to.

The expectations of nationhood are reinforced through Atatürk and the sacred place of Atatürk. This leaves the children with no choice but to fulfil their roles. Preschoolers were aware of these expectations and some of them overemphasised their love of Atatürk as Esma from Mavi did:

Nehir: Which country do you live in?

Esma: Turkey.

Nehir: Do you know any other country?

Esma: Istanbul, Africa, Akdere (probably a village in Turkey), Arabia. We live in a different country. We cannot move from here because of Atatürk. Atatürk made this country for us. Other countries, enemies, had occupied Turkey and Atatürk saved us. I watch Atatürk everyday on television. I even heard his voice and I saw how he died. He lay on the bed and shut his eyes and someone said he died.

(from the interview, 28 February 2014)

The representation of Atatürk as a mystical hero leads some children to make a connection between Atatürk and God. For instance, Özlem from Mavi pointed out ordinary people do not have a grave like Atatürk's. It seems that he is more than human but he is not a God either. Ozan from Nar stated: 'if we do not remember Atatürk, God punishes us'. Hearing statements like 'Atatürk is not dead, he lives in our hearts' or 'he always watches us from above' puts him in a sacred place for some children. Teacher Fatma found the representation of Atatürk as a sacred figure problematic. In her interview, she said that Atatürk was not alone when he was fighting for this nation. According to her, it should be stated that this nation has a history that goes beyond Atatürk because otherwise Atatürk's actions sound magical. This may be the reason she does not use heroic poems and songs in her classroom activities. Teacher Zehra does not find the presentation of Atatürk confusing, rather her practices emphasise Atatürk as a national hero.

However, Esra's admiration of Atatürk is not based on a mystical representation of him. Instead, she admires his powerful position. Esra from Nar says that she wants to be Atatürk when she grows up because she loves Atatürk a lot. Her love of Atatürk is related to her ambition to be strong. As mentioned in the gender identity chapter, Esra creates strategies to gain power in boys' play. Atatürk is a role model for Esra because diverse classroom practices show that Atatürk is an incredibly important character. However, on one occasion some of boys told her that she could not grow up to be Atatürk because she is a girl. Esra insisted that she can be Atatürk but the boys confidently repeated that there is a mismatch because Atatürk is a man and Esra is a girl. At this point, gender and national identities overlap. The boys were happy that Atatürk was in their gender category and this gave them the power to reject Esra's ambition of becoming a strong leader who can direct the nation. The nation can be directed or rescued by a man but not by a woman is the idea that the children produce by combining their ideas about the national hero with the gendered world. MoNE does not challenge this overlap but Esra does. Although hegemonic discourses do not support her ambition, she is willing to cross boundaries by challenging them.

The symbol of Atatürk is not only limited to representations. It is also possible to hear his name in a song or in a poem in daily classroom activities. The main aim of these kinds of activities may not put Atatürk at the centre but they are often used during story time and in Turkish language lessons as a starter activity. Teacher Zehra often used songs, poems and nursery rhymes about Atatürk in her classroom practice but Fatma did not give a place to these activities at Nar. While memorising and performing a song or a poem can be important for some children to fulfil their roles as students, for some they can be seen as burden. In other words, completing a task

willingly or unwillingly is most children's initial concern and focusing on the meaning of a poem or song is a secondary concern. It seems important for some children to memorise and perform the lyrics of songs or the words of poems correctly. Despite their repetitiveness in the class, some need extra help to memorise songs and poems. Burak from Mavi explained in his interview that his mother helped him to memorise Atatürk's songs at home. This could have been set as a homework task. It is important to note that when these tasks are set, the children are aware that these songs and poems are also about Atatürk. Some children wanted to sing a song or tell a nursery rhyme about him in their interviews when they picked Atatürk's picture from the interview box. For instance, Serdar picked Atatürk's picture from the box and when I asked him what he knows about Atatürk he said that he knows a song about him. When I asked what the song is about, he said that it was about how Atatürk rescued 'us' from the enemies. The song Burak and Serdar mentioned was the song that I heard the first time I visited Mavi. Teacher Zehra and the children were singing this song entitled Atatürk before watching a cartoon. It was a dynamic performance where the children and teacher Zehra used some face, arm and hand gestures to make the performance more dramatic. For instance, when Atatürk was mentioned in the song, they pointed to Atatürk's portrait and when enemies were mentioned, they made their faces angry. Essentially, its lyrics are about 'how the Turkish nation is rescued from enemies with enormous effort from Atatürk' and 'this nation owes its existence to him'. The song starts with the enemy occupation of the country and then Atatürk repels the enemies. The lyrics go on to explain that as a result, Turkey is established as a modern and happy country and that this could not have been possible without Atatürk:

ATATÜRK

Come and be friends,

You do not have the right to take our homeland,

Leave our country.

O Atatürk,

You were born in the right moment

You rescued our country from enemies.

A free nation, a modern country,

A powerful homeland and a happy Turkey

Our yearning hearts beat together as one with our nation.

If this heavenly homeland still exists, it is all thanks to you, Atatürk!

(Translated by author)

I have heard this song many times and I memorised it after hearing it a couple of times. In fact, there are some songs and poems about Atatürk in my memory that I learned during my primary and secondary school years. As it happened at Mavi, constant singing can make these songs unforgettable for some. Undoubtedly the teachers' approach and their repertoire play a crucial role in children learning songs about Atatürk. For instance, Aydın from Mavi cited a poem in his interview that he had memorised because his teacher Zehra had promised him a reward. The encouragement of teacher Zehra reveals that memorising a poem about Atatürk is

positively reinforced and because of this some children strive to fulfil the expectations of their teacher and their school.

Nehir: What does this picture represent to you? (he picks the picture of Atatürk from the box)

Aydın: I know a poem about Atatürk. 'Atatürk, I love you as much as I love the bread I eat. My mother, my father and my grandmother love you as well. There is a nation who loves you. You are the one who killed the enemies and showed us the right path!'

Nehir: How do you know this poem?

Aydın: Our teacher said whoever memorises this poem will get a big gift and our gifts were chocolate and candy.

Nehir: And you memorised it.

Aydın: Yes, it is easy. I could not memorize it the first day after I went to bed, I memorised it the next day.

(from the interview, 25 February 2014)

On another occasion at Mavi, the children and teacher Zehra sang a nursery rhyme about Atatürk prior to story time. The children shouted loudly and quickly then became silent and waited for the story. The children seemed to enjoy playing with the words and putting on different voices. The words of the rhyme are similar to the words of the song mentioned earlier which are:

When Atatürk is not here, there are many enemies.

Then Atatürk comes and beats the enemy.

Then he gives us this beautiful country.

After witnessing the constant usage of these activities at Mavi, it became clear why the children used similar statements in their interviews. It is safe to say that unwaved flags are flagging more at Mavi than they are at Nar.

5.3.3 The Children's Waved and Saluted Flags

While unwaved flags are not noticed in everyday life, there are special occasions like national days which 'break the everyday routine' by using waved flags (Billig, 1995:45). Lomsky-Feder (2011:585) points out that 'the ceremony is an embodied form of the national sentiment and may be seen as a contact zone where the national subject and the state meet'. In these meetings imagined communities become real through emotional performances of national subjects. These special celebrations and rituals remind subjects of their national identities by telling hegemonic or alternative narratives (Lomsky-Feder, 2011). The ceremonies of 29th October Republic Day and 10th November Anniversary of Atatürk's death day, that I attended at Nar, aimed to reproduce hegemonic narratives through Atatürk nationalism. In this section I will discuss the day of ceremonies and the classroom activities that took place in relation to these special days. I will also discuss Mavi's school trip to Anıtkabir that took place to mark the anniversary of Atatürk's death.

Collins (2004:53, cited in Zembylas, 2013:478) claims that in forced rituals 'instead of participants becoming naturally charged up by emotional entrainment, they have to put energy into giving the impression that they are charged up'. The ceremonies I will discuss in the following can be defined as forced rituals since they are structured

based on MoNE's rules and regulations. In these formal ceremonies while some students and staff are the audience, other students and staff attend the ceremony as performers. During these performances, they give speeches, sing songs and recite poems. According to MoNE, different teachers need to organise the ceremony each year. The students who participate in the ceremony committee are generally selected from among the best performing students because they are good at conveying the same messages that the Turkish education system tries to give. It is not surprising that these are mostly assiduous students who embody the role of the ideal student. They do not merely follow the rules but they also invest emotion into their roles. This can include giving dramatic readings, or even crying on stage. As such, they take part in producing hegemonic narratives. It is therefore difficult to claim that these ceremonies are forced rituals for all. It is also difficult to argue that national ceremonies evoke nationalist sentiments for all. Individuals may not feel the same excitement, sadness or happiness about their nation. Perhaps in order to resolve this issue, there were formal and informal aspects of the 29th October ceremony at Nar. These aspects aimed to enliven individuals and motivate them to continue in their 'forced' roles. To put it differently, forgetting about waved flags at special occasions may be necessary for the continuation of flag waving. In contrast, there was no informal dimension to the anniversary of Atatürk's death ceremony. Also the ceremony did not last as long as the 29th of October Republic Day activities.

5.3.3.1 The 90th Anniversary of the Founding of the Republic of Turkey

Based on my experiences at school, I expected to see the children making craft work to decorate the class at the beginning of the week that the 29th October was to fall in but Fatma did not deviate from the everyday routine. Neither the morning nor afternoon classes decorated the classroom in the run-up to Republic Day. Fatma did

not add any special activities such as teaching a new song or a poem to her lesson plans in the week preceding Republic Day. The School had a half-day holiday on the 28th October and there was a whole school assembly and ceremony on the 29th October but Fatma told her classes that they need not come into school on either day. She cited the non-compulsory nature of school ceremonies and assemblies for preschoolers and said that if children wished to attend the ceremony, their parents would have to accompany them. From this, it can be said that Fatma did not want to attend the ceremony as she delegated the responsibility of taking the children to the ceremony to parents and carers. Despite Fatma's decision, I went into school on that day in order to attend the ceremony. The 29th October Republic Day is one of the most important national days celebrated in schools and the ceremony that I attended has been performed for 90 years since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. I saw Cansu, Ozan and Mert from the class during the ceremony. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to ask their families the reasons why they brought their children to the ceremony but I did later have the opportunity to ask the children about their attendance. Ozan came to the ceremony because his older brother would be reciting a poem. Mert and Cansu came because their parents brought them to the ceremony. They all watched the ceremony with a Turkish flag in their hands.

The ceremony was performed in the school playground. The audience consisted of staff, students and parents. There were two big Turkish flags and between them Atatürk's portrait hung in front of the school. The ceremony started with a minute's silence for Atatürk, important Turkish historical figures and Turkish martyrs. After this, the national anthem was sung. Following this, first the head teacher and then another teacher gave speeches on how the Turkish nation was established by Atatürk and his friends and how they fought to end the Ottoman Empire. Afterwards, a

couple of students read some poems and gave speeches. They were mainly about the difficulties faced in the founding of the Turkish state; how Turkey became a modern state after successive wars and finally how the republican system is the best kind of state. The most striking part of the ceremony was the elementary year three students' presentation. In the presentation, the changes that occurred during the transition from empire to republic were shown by nine students. Each student presented one change: secularism, democracy, freedom, equality, modernity, science-technology, art and industry. For instance, the student who carried the secularism poster said: 'When I was not here, there was the caliphate but I came and separated the state from religion.' After each change presented itself, other groups of students came onto the stage carrying a letter. Together, these letters formed the word 'republic'. This presentation received the biggest applause from the audience. The visual presentation of the process of the Turkish state's establishment aimed to create an image in the students' mind that Atatürk abolished the Ottoman Empire and founded the Turkish Republic by making diverse changes. The main message of the ceremony was that if Atatürk had not founded the Turkish Republic, 'we' would not be as modern and as free as we are today. A stark binary was presented between Republican and Imperial systems. While imperialism was presented as an undeveloped, dark and negative regime, the republic was presented as an enlightening and emancipatory one.

Until this point, the ceremony followed a formal structure but then five boys from elementary year one presented a dance show. The song was a very popular song (Ankara'nın Bağları) with no relation to the Turkish Republic or to Atatürk. The students and audience put aside the themes of war, state systems and Atatürk in order to dance together. The sudden thematic shift was striking. Following this performance, there was once again a return to formal structures. As a concluding act,

all staff and students who took part in the ceremony came to the front of the stage. Together they shouted: 'Before the Republic it was dark. Then my Atatürk brought the light. He taught me my identity, my Turkishness. How happy is the one who says I am a Turk.' Then balloons were released into the sky accompanied by the 10th Year March²³. Enthusiasm and excitement reached its apex at this point. It can be argued that the informal part of the ceremony was used to excite the audience and that this excitement was then channelled into the formal aspect of singing the 10th Year March at the end of the ceremony. After the ceremony, popular songs were played from the sound system and parents, students and staff continued to dance together. The ceremony ended with dancing.

The day after the ceremony, there were activities planned for the class. It is normal for students to discuss what they did to celebrate Republic Day in class on the 30th October but teacher Fatma did not ask any questions based on the previous day's ceremony. On the 31st October when I was interviewing Ozan, however, they started a craft activity in the class which was based on Republic Day. The activity was very structured and teacher Fatma told the children to colour pictures of flowers in and then to cut them out. She did not tell the children what the aim of the lesson was at the beginning but whilst the children worked, she and Elif Aba prepared round pieces of card and pictures of Atatürk were placed in the middle. Then teacher Fatma asked the children to stick their flower colourings around Atatürk's picture. At this point, an interesting dialogue between the children and teacher Fatma arose. She tried to provide a simple definition of the concept of a republic. However, even I

²³The 10th year march is a popular nationalist song written in the 1930s that is often used in public ceremonies and events.

found her definition difficult to understand. Following this, when the children began to ask questions, teacher Fatma's only response was 'Atatürk'.

Teacher Fatma: Who governs you? (asking the children)

The children: Atatürk! (shouting)

Teacher Fatma: Not Atatürk, me, me!! (she laughs) I govern you. At home your mother or father are elected to govern you. This is what a republic is! What is our system?

The children: Atatürk! (shouting again)

Teacher Fatma: No, it is a republic. Atatürk was the first president of the Turkish Republic. Atatürk and his soldiers fought to establish this republic.

(from the field diary, 31 October 2013)

'Atatürk' was the easiest response the children could make to these vague and difficult questions. It was also made easier through the emphasis given to Atatürk by the activity because the children assumed that their answers had to be based on Atatürk. Teacher Fatma felt that it was necessary to provide some explanation and context to the in-class activity. She did so by attempting to give some information about the 29th October. However, it was clear that the lesson was unplanned. Teacher Fatma said that the children's flower images would be pinned to the display board outside the classroom. At this point, I realised that the purpose of the activity was to generate something to decorate the display board with. The flower colourings were put on display alongside coloured in images of flags made by the parallel afternoon cohort of students (see Figure 5.4). In a staggered school setting, class

display boards become a source of competition between morning and afternoon school groups. For instance, teacher Fatma told me that when some parents see that the other cohort have done nicer activities than their children's cohort, they ask teacher Fatma to arrange for their children to do the same activities as the afternoon class. On this occasion, teacher Fatma realised that she needed to do arts and crafts on the theme of Atatürk and the 29th October Republic Day. Therefore, it seems that the initial aim of this activity was filling the display board just as the afternoon class had done. Improving cutting and colouring skills were secondary concerns for teacher Fatma.

This activity became important not just for Fatma, but also for the children presenting their work on the display board. At the beginning they focused on cutting and drawing and they tried to complete the task but when Fatma said the work was for the display board, they became more concerned about cutting and colouring to the very best of their ability. Some asked for my help and some came to show me how nice their work was. This shows that the children also care about displaying their work.



Figure 5.4: The board of Nar which is located just outside the classroom.

Through this activity, the children were given the message that Atatürk is important. Fatma prepared the cards with Atatürk's picture on it. It is clear that she did not want to risk asking the children to cut out the pictures of Atatürk themselves not only because the children may not have been able to do this task neatly but also because it is illegal to deface any image of Atatürk. Fatma's responsibility for cutting and handling the images of Atatürk underline Atatürk's sacred place in classroom discourses. In this way, the children's engagement with the activity and with the image of Atatürk was entirely under Fatma's control. The children stuck their flowers around Atatürk's picture under close supervision and clear direction from the teacher. Then each child took their card and gave it to Elif Abila who pinned them to the board. At this point, some children were happy that their work was displayed near the top of the board or close to their friends' work. Some of the children tried to show me where their work was on the board. However, this was difficult not only for me, but also for the children because the pieces of work were all so similar that it was very hard to differentiate them. This reveals that the children's voices are marginalised by the rigid structures of the education system. It is hard to claim primary concern of this is the creation and formation of national identities. Indeed, it was more apparent that the focus of the activity was to fulfil the perceived roles of student and teacher in the creation of work for display. In this way we can argue that although identity formation may not lie at the core of classroom activities, one unforeseen effect of activities such as the one discussed above is to entrench certain fixed ways of being.

5.3.3.2 10th November: The Anniversary of Atatürk's Death

The anniversary of Atatürk's death at Nar did not have great significance in Fatma's plans for the class either. The 10th to the 16th of November is 'Atatürk Week' (MoNE, 2013); during this week Atatürk and his life are expected to be at the centre of all teaching activities. Although Atatürk is always the main character of national days, in this week Atatürk's personal life; his childhood, youth and later stages come to the forefront. One of the important activities of this week is visiting Atatürk's mausoleum, Anıtkabir. During my primary and secondary school years, I visited Anıtkabir on several occasions. Schools from all around Turkey organise trips to visit Anıtkabir especially during Atatürk week and other national days. However, for Fatma it was not a good time to organise the trip because of the inclement weather and because of the tedious process of hiring a coach and obtaining parental consent. Being busy with her own child, teacher Fatma also said that she does not have the time or energy to spend organising a school trip. She made it clear however, that she has taken her pupils on many trips to Anıtkabir in the past. Teacher Fatma explained that teachers who are more religious and are opposed to Atatürk Nationalism do not organise trips to Anıtkabir. In explaining this, she made it very clear that she is not one of these teachers but rather she has not been able to organise any trip to Anıtkabir recently because of her lack of energy.

On the Anniversary of Atatürk's death, very few children from the class attended the ceremony. It was not on a week-day so very few people attended the ceremony. It started with the flag ceremony but the flag was at half-mast to show the nation's mourning. It was followed by poems and speeches delivered by head teacher and assistant of head teacher, teachers and students. They were all about Atatürk's personal life and how his character created the nation. The voices were dramatic and

sadness was used to emphasise the nation's loss. The most dramatic scene in the ceremony was at five past nine (the exact time at which Atatürk died). Sirens started to wail at Nar as they did everywhere across the country. On the 10th November, traffic, daily life and everything comes to a halt. This is the time the nation is expected to share the sadness of the anniversary of Atatürk's death. I remember that I cried at this special moment when I was in secondary school because it was an intense and a powerfully unifying feeling. However, in this ceremony, I was only curious about this ritual, and about what was going on in the children's minds. Some seemed frightened of the loud sirens and looked around with anxiety whereas some children stared at the flag with sad eyes. Despite the students playing their roles well, the ceremony did not last as long as 29th October one; perhaps this is because there was no drama or dancing in the programme.

The day after the ceremony, there were no special activities scheduled at Nar. Neither Fatma nor any of the children mentioned the anniversary of Atatürk's death. I realised that the afternoon class had put new drawings on their display board and that the afternoon cohort had drawn pictures Anıtkabir. This time teacher Fatma did not change the board perhaps because the Atatürk concept was already there from the previous craft work. It is fair to say that for teacher Fatma this national message given by ceremonies and classroom activities is more dominated by practical considerations than it is by the importance of inculcating national sentiment. For her, organising the trip to Anıtkabir or preparing arts and crafts activities about Atatürk creates additional responsibilities that put extra strain on her personal life. Beyond this, she revealed her approach to Atatürk and Turkish nationalism in an interview. At its heart, her definition of nationalism does not fit in with MoNE's principles.

Nehir: Do you do something special with your ideas in classroom activities?

Teacher Fatma: I used to but since my child's accident, I no longer have the time. I used to be active for national days. Especially for Republic Day and Children's Day. I used to organise a lot of performances. After the ceremonies, children, parents and head teacher and assistant of head teacher were always very happy with me but now I am completely estranged from this. We had health problems but the state did not help us so now my national feelings have died. In foreign countries the state helps people. When I come to class, I am not a happy teacher because I have problems at home. I cannot say that I love my country. Who you live with is important, not the soil you live on. When people do not share, there is no meaning.

(from the interview, 13 November 2013)

Despite teacher Fatma not organising any activities based on the Anniversary of Atatürk's death in the classroom, some children were still aware of this day due to their home life experiences. Children sometimes bring outside experiences to the classroom that can change the routine of classroom activities. This was not the case at Nar. At one point when a child was discussing Atatürk's death with peers, teacher Fatma ignored the conversation and chose not to derail her lesson. The only other time that Atatürk's death was mentioned was with me in an interview. A few days after the 10th November, one child, Murat started to sing a song about Atatürk that went 'Atatürk is not dead, he lives in our hearts'. After finishing his song, he said that his mother had taught him it. His mother had probably taught the song in relation to the 10th November. However, his friends did not pay attention to the Atatürk part of the song. Instead, his friends began to sing a pop song. Murat did not want to join

them because he was aware that he had learned a special song that deserved special commendation or applause. However, if Murat had given this performance to the right audience at the right time, he would have received the applause and praise he expected. The 10th November was also raised in Bilal's interview. When he picked Atatürk's picture from the box, Bilal started to talk about how his father took him to Anıtkabir at the weekend because 'Atatürk died'. He was very excited to tell me about Atatürk's cars, ship and guns all of which are on display at the Anıtkabir museum. He also told me about the big lion statues that are located at the entrance of Anıtkabir. Children experience a range of emotions when they visit Anıtkabir, mostly because of its size and grandeur. The monuments at Anıtkabir are designed to evoke national sentiments. The location and architecture of Anıtkabir aims to remind the Turkish Nation of the importance of Atatürk. It is on one of the hills of Ankara and this symbolises Atatürk's gaze over the nation. Meeker (1997) defines Anıtkabir as a place where Turkish citizens and the founder of the nation meet:

...the tomb is a site for interpersonal exchange between citizen and founder. Symbolically at least, the citizen can be heard and seen by the founder, just as the founder can be heard and seen by the citizen. (Meeker, 1997:171)

Figure 5.6: The grave of Atatürk.





Figure 5.7: The top view of Anıtkabir.

This encounter between citizen and founder can have different meanings for children. Mavi's trip to Anıtkabir and the interviews I conducted provide insight into children's responses to the monument. Zehra organized a trip to Anıtkabir before the 10th November to avoid crowds. They also visited Atatürk's house. Although they did not visit the house, they had lunch in the gardens. As it would have been difficult to have both a tour of the house and of Anıtkabir in the space of one day, teacher Zehra chose to simply have lunch in the grounds of Atatürk's house in order to maintain the Atatürk theme. In general, the children mostly talked about how they brought flowers to leave on Atatürk's grave, how big Anıtkabir was, and how they had lunch in the garden of Atatürk's house. The unique character of the place created some good and some bad impressions for the children. For instance, Nida from Mavi found the tomb frightening due to the war stimulation in the museum of Anıtkabir. It can be assumed that this war stimulation in the museum aims to demonstrate Atatürk's fight with the enemies and how frightening and difficult it is to take up the mantle of responsibility in wartime. The exhibit was mostly likely designed to evoke fear for Nida:

Nida: ... Once we went to Anıtkabir. It was a very big place. There were Atatürk's guns, medals, swords, clothes, tables, phones and military things. But we were getting very tired of seeing them all. And there was a man who lay on the floor like he was dead but it was not a life-like statue. There were also lots of bomb noises it was very frightening. Lots of people could get lost there because it is really a very big place.

(from the interview, 27 February 2014)

In addition to this, some children stated that they found it fascinating to visit Anıtkabir because they liked the selection of cars and guns on display in the museum. Clearly, some abstract notions find substance in Anıtkabir. For example, seeing Atatürk's weapons can provide context to memorised knowledge about his fight with the enemies. Seeing the size of the monument also reinforces the notion of Atatürk as an incredibly important figure. Combining abstract notions with tangible ones can create new stories in children's minds. As an example of this, Özlem from Mavi created her own story based on what she had seen at Anıtkabir.

Nehir: How was the trip to Anıtkabir?

Özlem: We went to Anıtkabir and there were Atatürk's guns and he was injured. His ship sank and then he died. But his grave is not like our graves. I mean not with soil... Actually he did not die he lies in bed. He is sleeping now.

(from the interview, 4 March 2014)

Even though there is a grave, for Özlem this did not disturb the notion that ‘he still lives in the hearts of people of the nation’. As Elmas (2007:62) states, ‘Literally children have a relation with a dead person but this dead person is still in their life’. This notion creates ambiguity in some children’s minds because it is often repeated with the image of Atatürk simply sleeping on his deathbed. Poems and songs about him also use this metaphor to intensify his greatness. When Özlem talked about Anıtkabir, she said that she saw the grave but in actual fact Atatürk was not there because he is lying asleep in bed. Özlem did not find any problem with this notion and it seems that she takes this metaphor literally. In contrast, Selim from Mavi could not resolve the contradiction of an Atatürk who is both dead and alive. He was afraid to question this contradiction because Atatürk is seen as untouchable and unquestionable:

Nehir: How was the Anıtkabir trip?

Selim: It was a really big place (he opened his arms wide to show how big it was). Actually Atatürk is not dead, he is sleeping (he paused and waited, then in an questioning voice). But then why have they written that Atatürk is dead on his grave if he is not dead?

(from the interview, 6 March 2014)

5.4 Conclusion

MoNE aims to create citizens who follow Atatürk nationalism. However, this was interpreted and understood differently by staff and children at Nar and Mavi. In the first part of this chapter I discussed the way in which the staff at Mavi followed hegemonic discourses as MoNE direct by believing in and presenting the same

national values. On the other hand, staff at Nar approach these discourses in a sceptical way but disseminate them nonetheless because they were obliged to. Moving from Billig's (1995) banal nationalism concept national identity reminders were named as waved and unwaved flags to explore how national identities are constructed in Nar and Mavi. Although both waved and unwaved flags were present at the two schools, both schools approaches in how these flags were waved differ. For instance, at Nar national ceremonies were celebrated by integrating formal and informal activities in order to keep the ceremony 'natural'. On the other hand, at Mavi both waved and unwaved flags were taken more serious since all staff believed in Atatürk nationalism as core of Turkish education system.

It was found that these approaches influence the ways in which children engage with national discourses. The children at Mavi tried to follow the hegemonic discourses they were given by their teacher because teacher Zehra supplemented these discourses with diverse practices. The children felt the necessity to reproduce hegemonic narratives at Mavi more than they did at Nar. However, the children did not always try to do their national identity right at Nar and Mavi because they could not fully grasp the messages that banal nationalism sought to convey. At this point, Thompson's (2001) local nationalism concept was useful to understand how the children engaged with national identity reminders. Children's ideas about the Turkish flag, the pictures of Atatürk -as materials that used in interviews- and national day ceremonies were discussed to explore local nationalism in both classroom settings. Although some children interpreted national symbols and rituals in a way that differed based on MoNE's and staff expectations, they did not also question or search for other ways of beings as they did in performing their gender identities. The reason children did not attempt to cross these boundaries is closely

related to MoNE's strict control and management of class work. MoNE strictly defines the boundaries of nation and nationhood. Teachers and peers reinforced this, which made it more difficult for children to take risks and challenge received ideas. Children were also not shown any other ways of being beyond their own national identities and this may mean that children did not know what exists beyond the boundaries that are given to them.

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have explored the construction of gender and national identities in two preschools settings by focusing on the identities offered in Nar and Mavi and the children's engagement with these discourses. This chapter will discuss the findings in three sections by situating this study's contribution in the existing literature. In the first section I will discuss the construction of gender and national identities in relation to each other in preschool settings. The children in this study construct their national identities through Atatürk nationalism in both preschool settings because they do not conceptualise what being Turkish is. They are 'the children of Atatürk' but they are not the sons or daughters of Atatürk. Although the gender neutral approach of the Kemalist ideology does not position boys and girls differently, the images of Turkish women and men are constructed through the militarist basis of this ideology and traditional family roles in society. While being a boy/father is constructed through performing certain forms of masculinity, being a girl/mother is constructed through performing certain forms of femininity. Hence the role of these forms of masculinity and femininity in the construction of nations will

be discussed based on three main concepts: ‘the children of Atatürk’, ‘being a girl/mother’ and ‘being a boy/father’. In the second section I will discuss how Nar and Mavi offer the same three concepts in different ways because applications of schools and more importantly of teachers. In the last section children’s engagement with these three main concepts will be explained by emphasising their role in reproducing, interpreting and resisting these gender and national discourses. Also this last section argues the inseparable relation between structure and agency in the construction of identities by bringing preschools and children’s agency into play.

6.2 The Children of Atatürk who will be the Future Mothers and Fathers of the Nation

Studies about nationalism (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 2006) have not paid enough attention to how gender plays a role in the making of nations. Some scholars have argued that the relation between gender and nationalism needs to be considered since they are constructed in relation to each other (Kandiyoti, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Connell (1990) claims that each nation-state has its own gender regime that regulates gender relations in society. Kandiyoti (1991) points out that within this regulation the integration of women and men into national projects differs. According to Yuval-Davis (1997), women participate in national and ethnic processes by being the biological producers of the nation, drawing boundaries between ethnic and national groups, and transmitting cultural narratives. Nagel (1998:243) reminds us that these roles are given to women and are determined ‘by men, for men and about men’; therefore, it is important to consider the participation of both men and women in the making of nations. The first research question in this study sought to find out how gender and national identities manifest themselves in preschool policies and practices

since the Turkish education system has been an important tool to remind citizens of the roles of Turkish men and women in the national process. However, this study has not identified the images of ‘Turkish men and women’ in preschool settings because the children did not define themselves as Turkish and furthermore the preschools did not offer discourses such that the children could conceptualise what being Turkish means. Therefore, rather than discussing children’s construction of Turkish men and women, this study discusses gender and national identities through three main concepts: Atatürk’s children, being a girl/mother and being a boy/father.

Although there were diverse meanings around the children to awaken their national identities in both preschool classrooms, the children were not concerned about being Turkish. Howard and Gill (2001) found that the children who were between the ages of 7-12 in their study were not concerned about being Australian. One reason they mention is children’s limited engagement with abstract notions. Limited engagement with the abstract concepts of nations and nationalities could also be the case for this study because, as some studies have discussed, children use concrete explanations in terms of the self and others more than abstract explanations in their early years. For instance, Blaise (2005) and Browne (2004) found that children categorise girls and boys based on their clothes and appearances, and some scholars mention skin colour, stereotypes, maps and flags to define national identity groups (Carrington & Short, 1995; Dockett & Cusack, 2003). This explanation concurs with what the developmental framework suggests: children develop their thinking from concrete to abstract. However, as Howard and Gill (2001) point out, this answer does not explain children’s engagement with national discourses around them and also what is available to children in order to position themselves as national subjects.

At this point it should be noted that it was clear that the preschools do not inform the children about the Turkish nation and other nationalities. Based on the early years' curriculum and staff in both schools it was found that the children were too young to develop meanings and understandings about being Turkish or non-Turkish in the preschools. The findings of this study indicate that the two preschool settings offered diverse discourses to construct national identities based on Atatürk nationalism. Children encounter national narratives about Atatürk and they receive messages about how to be a good citizen by following the road drawn by Atatürk. The findings revealed that these meanings led the children to define the country they live in as Atatürk's country because 'Atatürk established this country by fighting and beating the enemies'. This heroic narrative reminds children that they owe their existence to Atatürk. Therefore, the first duty that Atatürk gives children and young people is protecting the unity of the imagined community of Atatürk. In Elmas's (2007) study primary school students mentioned that their duty is to work hard because they have to pay their debt by following the path that Atatürk opened. Similarly, the children in this study were aware of their debts, as Sevda reminded herself that she needed to work harder when the issue of Atatürk was mentioned in her interview (see page 232).

What the children in this study were concerned about was being citizens of Atatürk's country. The boundaries were drawn between one who is a responsible citizen of Atatürk's country and one who does not fulfil the roles offered by the grand narrative. With respect to the second research question, it was found that the children tended to repeat the national discourses of the preschools to stay within the boundaries. They also read national symbols and discourses as being related to Atatürk; for instance, the Turkish flag is not the flag of the nation but Atatürk's flag

or, when teacher Fatma asked the children what the word ‘republic’ meant, the straightforward answer was ‘Atatürk’. Hence others are not any other nationalities, ethnicities, cultures or races but rather they are the ones who are against Atatürk in preschools. Also there were no children in these classes who had non-Turkish backgrounds which did not expose them to the idea of other nations. Only one group was identified as others, enemies. Enemies are portrayed as the opposing group and the message preschools give is how their occupation of the country was repelled by the national hero. The enemies were portrayed as bad people in the children’s interviews as well. This finding reveals that being against Atatürk can mean being bad people. Therefore, being good people necessitates being on the side of Atatürk, as was evident in the song sung in Mavi:

Come and be friends,

You do not have the right to take our homeland,

Leave our country.

O Atatürk,

You were born in the right moment

You rescued our country from enemies.

Preschoolers are the children of Atatürk; however, they are not the sons and daughters of Atatürk because the Kemalist ideology of the Turkish education system approaches boys and girls as equal national subjects in their early years. Although they are not the sons and daughters of Atatürk for the schools, the meanings around them present the roles of women and men differently in the making of the nation. In

other words, 'us' is divided by gender. The curriculum of preschool does not contain any gendered discourses in terms of reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. It is not promoting any kind of masculinities and femininities but practices were not in the same line with the curriculum. This is an important finding because it shows the contradiction between the gender neutral approach of the Turkish education system and gendered classroom practices. It is safe to claim that the practices of both classrooms reproduce gendered roles for girls and boys and men and women.

First of all, heroic narratives about Atatürk in preschools represent men as defenders of the nation who fight and kill their enemies. These traditional militarist roles in the narratives show the masculine character of the nation, which expects men to be brave and courageous and to give their lives for the sake of the nation because men are responsible for looking after the nation by defending the borders (Nagel, 1998). The findings show that these masculine traits are attached to being a male. 'Boys do not cry' and 'boys are strong' are the common sentences heard in preschools that remind boys of what they should or should not do. It was acceptable for boys to be violent and aggressive since war and fighting requires that. This was not just because the nation expects them to be masculine. It was also thought that boys are born with this nature in both preschools. Consequently, this internal boundary gives a more powerful place to boys in preschool settings. On the other hand, naturalising this position puts pressure on boys to behave in certain ways. Therefore, boys struggle to cross boundaries since performing femininities and other forms of masculinity is not welcomed (Connell, 1987). In other words, on the one hand hegemonic masculinity gives more power to boys in regulating classroom settings (Lowe, 1998; Danby & Baker, 1998), and, on the other hand, it is more difficult to leave this advantageous position when it comes to performing other forms of masculinity and femininity.

The other representation of men in the preschools was the father role. The father was portrayed as the person who looks after his family by working in masculine jobs. This traditional father role was reproduced by diverse discourses in both preschool settings. In the representations fathers engage with certain tasks like driving and lifting heavy stuff, which requires a strong body. Many of the children in this study mentioned that their fathers work to buy them food, clothes and toys. Also most of the children portrayed their fathers as going to work and then coming back to the home where they sit and watch television. Although there were a few examples of men helping the mother with housework, both in the children's views and in the preschool settings, their main duties were represented as bringing money into the home. Fathers are breadwinners. This father role reminds boys of their future roles in the family and also in the nation.

The findings show that there are no women figures in the heroic narratives of preschools except for the mother and sister of Atatürk. However, the lack of women figures as soldiers or heroes does not stop Esra from Nar from wanting to become a national hero. As a girl she wanted to cross the boundary because this position could bring her more power. She expressed her ambition to become Atatürk when she grew older but some of the boys responded to her wish negatively because she is a girl and Atatürk is a man. Although the boys seemed to emphasise the mismatch between her and Atatürk's sex, this understanding gives us clues about the positions of men and women in the nation building process. The idea that girls cannot fight because they are naïve and sensible was the one trait attached to girls. Similar to Francis's (1998) 'sensible selflessness' position, this study found that girls are expected to be mature and calm and to act as mediators. Portraying girls with these boundaries does not give them an active position because their play and spaces are restricted and

controlled by boys more than they can be involved in boys' play and areas. Some studies mention that girls have power in the homecorner area because they perform the mother role in domestic space (MacNaughton, 2000; Blaise, 2005). This study also found that girls have power in the homecorner area. However, it is difficult to interpret whether this power can be seen as hegemonic femininity because this area can be controlled by hegemonic masculinity. It is a place that can be colonised by boys; for instance, Ahmet in Mavi easily entered the homecorner area to disturb the girls' play or Egemen in Nar took the toys from the area by using his hegemonic masculinity power. Girls seem powerful in this area, but girls' mediating role leads them to leave their powerful position to boys even in the homecorner.

In this study girls constructed their gender identities through the mother role, also because women were mostly represented as mothers in both preschools. Most of the children in this study saw the mother role as looking after the inside of the home by cooking, cleaning and caring for children. This representation reminded the girls of their role in bringing up the children of the nation. Although the Kemalist ideology portrays Turkish women as educated and modern and participating in employment, their vital role is motherhood (Acar, 1994). Kandiyoti (1991) claims that there is a double burden on women's shoulders since the establishment of the Turkish Republic because, while private patriarchy still keeps its place in family life, public patriarchy also demands that women work in order to contribute to economic growth. In both classrooms it was observed that women are portrayed as working women, but in particular jobs like teachers and care workers. Hence it is fair to say that these classrooms did not offer alternative meanings about gender and work.

All in all, it is hard to distinguish the influence of these national representations on the construction of gender identities or vice versa because they are closely intertwined. Nagel (1998:251-252) points out that terms like honour, patriotism, cowardice, bravery and duty are hard to distinguish as either nationalistic or masculinist, since they seem so thoroughly tied to both the nation and to manliness. Also it is hard to separate the construction of femininities in nations and the construction of nations in femininities. Hence this study claims that boys and girls construct their national identities by performing masculinities and femininities and they also construct masculinities and femininities by performing their national identities because the idea of 'nation is gendered and gender is nationed' (Yuval-Davis, 1997:21). On the other hand, performing masculinities or femininities cannot be reduced to the representation of men and women roles in schools only since children engage with diverse discourses in their family lives, peer relations and the mass media. Children perform different ways of being based on their personal experiences, which will be discussed in detail in a later section of this chapter. Now I want to discuss the differences between Nar and Mavi in the construction of Atatürk nationalism, being a boy/father and being a girl/mother by comparing mainly school approaches and teachers' applications.

6.3 Nar and Mavi

The focus of this study is understanding the gender and national discourses that are available to children in preschool settings and how they engage with these discourses in their identity construction. Billig (1995) points out that national identities are not constructed only on special occasions; they are also reproduced in everyday life. This idea can be applied to gender identities as well since individuals engage with diverse

discourses in their everyday lives by positioning themselves and others. Inspired by Billig's banal nationalism idea, I would like to propose that there are direct and indirect reminders of gender and national identities in preschools. These reminders work to awaken certain identities but in different ways. Direct reminders aim to construct certain identities by emphasising this purpose. For instance, the children were reminded of how the Turkish Republic was established by Atatürk on the 29 October Republic Day Ceremony in Nar. This national event purposely aims to awaken national feelings and teach children national values. Similar gender identities were emphasised in teacher Zehra's practices when she encouraged the girls and the boys to play together to prevent gender separation. In other words, specific discourses are practised purposely on these kinds of occasions to awaken gender and national identities. On the other hand, indirect reminders also aim to awaken identities but they do not need to be emphasised on specific occasions as Billig's banal nationalism suggests. Categorising toys as toys for girls and toys for boys and placing them in certain areas can remind children of their gender identity categories and having a Turkish flag in a classroom can be seen as a national identity reminder. However, these symbols and messages are not emphasised specifically; rather their existence is enough to remind the children of their identities. This section will discuss how direct and indirect reminders are used differently to construct Atatürk nationalism, being a girl/mother and being a boy/father categories in Nar and Mavi.

Before starting to compare Nar and Mavi, it is necessary to remember the centralised system of the Turkish education system in order to clarify the differences. As argued in chapter 2, all educational institutions work under the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Turkey. This body prepares the curriculum, textbooks and central exams, regulates physical settings and employs teachers and head teachers

and their assistants. Basically this means that schools function based on the rules and regulations of MoNE, as Çayır and Gürkaynak (2008:50) clarify:

The nation state has and always had a strong say and an active role in what is taught and how it is taught all over the country. Thus, it is through the socialization process where formal education plays a massive role that the children of the country are (a) taught the roles they need to play as citizens, and (b) expected to gain the “correct” consciousness thereby becoming modern and civilized people.

This explanation is in line with what Gellner (2006) claims about the top-down construction of national identities in education systems. Although this study accepts that education systems play a great role in the creation of identities, the actors (head teachers, teachers, assistants and children) also shape the education system by changing and interpreting its practices. Despite the centralised system of MoNE, this study found differences between the two schools’ approaches to national and gender identities. This finding is important as it shows how the same sentences can mean different things to different actors.

Although national identities are constructed through Atatürk nationalism in both settings, how the Kemalist ideology of MoNE is practised in the two schools differs. First of all, the head teacher and assistant of head teacher and preschool teachers of Nar were more flexible in applying the rules and regulations of MoNE compared to those of Mavi. It is safe to say that the imagined community of MoNE does not accord with the imagined communities of HT Mr. İsmail, HTA Mr. Cemal and teacher Fatma in Nar. Hence national identities are constructed based on Atatürk nationalism, not because these actors share the same national values and

understandings, but because they feel duty-bound to apply MoNE rules and regulations. For instance, Mr. Cemal believes that celebrating national days in school is a symbolic and empty practice since some students do not even know the meaning of the day. Contrary to Mr. Cemal, teacher Fatma believes that these symbolic practices are very important to evoke national identities, but she does not have any feelings towards the Turkish nation any more. She gave different reasons for not identifying herself with the Turkish nation, one of which was personal and the other political. The personal one was related to difficulties she encountered while bringing up her disabled child. She said she questioned being bound to the nation due to the lack of state support. Also she mentioned politics and how the national values of Turkey have changed due to intervention by external powers. According to her, these powers have tried to divide the people of Turkey into Kemalists and religious people and she believes that the Turkish identity involves both. As a consequence of these problems, she said that she did not spend time on practices that remind her of national identities. She also explained that she had been enthusiastically involved in the national day ceremonies by preparing dance and song choreographies, arranging visits to Anitkabir, and teaching songs and poems about Atatürk. However, she does not attend the ceremonies any more as I witnessed her absence on the two national days. Although all teachers have to attend these ceremonies according to MoNE, the school management and teacher Fatma did not find any problems with not following this rule. On the other hand, she felt obliged to prepare an activity for 29 October Republic Day, not to awake national identities but because of she wished to present the work of the children on the pinboard. Also, most of the children shared the same concern as teacher Fatma since they were not well informed about the meaning of the task with which they engaged.

Although they are still the children of Atatürk, the children in Nar had limited engagement with national identity reminders compared to the children in Mavi. Due to teacher Fatma adopting a more pragmatic approach, the children mostly engaged with the preparation of reading and writing activities. The observations revealed that this pragmatic approach gave teacher Fatma more time to engage with her personal life. For example, she could have meetings or make calls to keep an eye on her disabled son. On the other hand, teacher Fatma used this pragmatic approach because according to her, children have to learn to compete in order to live in this country. In order to prepare the children for this competition she valued being strong, powerful and challenging. This understanding deepens the inequalities between masculinities and femininities because these traits are mostly attached to masculinities. Uğur, as the desired citizen of teacher Fatma's imagined community, regulates the gender relations in the class by reminding his friends of certain ways of being a girl and being a boy. Teacher Fatma encouraged and gave responsibilities to Uğur, which did not challenge hegemonic masculinity. Also she did not intervene in gender relations, which also play a part in producing gender inequalities in classroom settings. Put a different way, to respond to the demands of a masculine nation, masculinities were praised more by teacher Fatma. She talked about the world as a man's world and said that mothers were responsible for this situation by doing everything for their boys. Therefore, according to her, the future is in the hands of mothers, which is closely related to what the nation-state expects from women. At this point father and mother roles are represented as the future roles of boys and girls. Teacher Fatma always explained the roles of mother and father to remind the children of their future roles. She stated that she never thought about men and women outside their family roles;

according to her, the only way to explain the roles of women and men to very young children is using mother and father roles.

On the other hand, it is safe to claim that teacher Zehra, HTA Mrs. Deniz and HT Mr. Ahmet in Mavi internalised the Kemalist ideology of MoNE. Atatürk nationalism was valued in Mavi not just because of MoNE requirements, but also because their personal beliefs ran along the same lines as the national identities offered by MoNE. The rules and regulations were followed closely. Therefore, the boundaries were more explicit in Mavi than in Nar. Teacher Zehra used heroic narratives of Atatürk by teaching songs and poems because she thought that abstract notions like national values and history should be made tangible to be helpful to the children's understandings. The children engaged with national discourses that reminded them that they are the children of Atatürk. Hence the children in Mavi mentioned these discourses that they learnt from teacher Zehra more than their outside school experiences in the interviews. Similarly, the head teacher and assistant of head teacher of Mavi thought that preschoolers are too young to develop ideas about their national identities, but they also believed that it was important that children participate in national day ceremonies to start their journey of becoming desired citizens of Atatürk's imagined community.

Moreover, the Kemalist ideology's gender neutral approach was taken more seriously in Mavi. Teacher Zehra had some strategies to reduce the power of hegemonic masculinity in the classroom setting by attempting to provide equality between the boys and girls. The observations revealed that these strategies regulated gender relations, but not in the same way as in Nar. Despite teacher Zehra believing that there are certain roles for men and women because they have innate differences,

she did not value any forms of masculinity and femininity. Hence she emphasised the differences but also the similarities between girls and boys. In other words, girls and boys are the children of Atatürk who deserve the same rights and freedom but they are different because of their biological anatomy. She used tools like puzzles of naked men's and women's bodies to visualise the bodies of men and women or she showed a video about 'how a baby is made'. These activities reminded the children of their future roles as men and women. As teacher Zehra claimed in her interview, a man cannot be a mother and a woman cannot be a father.

Children were given messages about their future mother and father roles in the imagined community of Atatürk in Mavi and Nar. Although the curriculum does not involve any specific aim to teach children that they will be a father and mother in the future, curriculum and practices lead the children to learn being a woman and a man through learning their role as mothers and fathers. This was articulated by underlining of the rigid gender division of labour inside the nuclear families. These were apparent in teachers' practices, sayings and behaviours. For example, teacher Zehra wanted me to read the book *Betül in Bazaar* or teacher Fatma showed the Pepe cartoon in Nar, which both contain messages about traditional gender roles in the family.

All in all, although these findings show that MoNE's centralised system leaves limited space for actors in the education system, there is still flexibility in preschools to apply rules and regulations of MoNE, as teacher Fatma did not follow them strictly. However, the point is here that it is not possible to suggest other ways of being in classroom settings. Consequently, existing discourses are perpetuated and reproduced.

6.4 Putting Children Back into Gender and National Identities

As can be seen from the sections above, preschools have a profound influence on the way in which national and gender identities are performed and understood. Undoubtedly children do not just use the discourses of preschools in their understanding of identities, there are also other influential sources like home, public life, and the mass media, which will be discussed later in this section. Like these sources, preschools produce sets of rules and resources that are applied in children's lives. Nar and Mavi, as bodies of a centralised education system, are obliged to apply the same rules and regulations of MoNE, but how these two settings implement, organise and reject the policies differs. In this process structures do not force individuals to behave in particular ways, nor do individuals behave independently from structures. As Davies (2003:13) clarifies:

A social structure is not separate from the individuals who make it up. It is not a 'thing' that can be imposed on individuals. It nevertheless has material force. Individuals cannot float free from social structure.

Hence this study attempts to overcome the structure and agency dualism by bringing together micro and macro approaches. In drawing on this attempt how social structures specify the practices of the educational system and how social relations between individuals (teacher-children, teacher-other staff) reproduce national and gender identities has been explored. Structural aspects relating to gender and nationhood have been shown to be mediated through discourses arising in both the school and the children's lives. The children are reminded about the roles of women and men in the making of the nation through diverse practices in both preschool settings. More importantly they also take part in producing gender and national

identities. I agree with Thompson's (2001) claim which is 'putting people back into nations', although I would change it to 'putting children back into their gender and national identities'. Children's agency needs to be taken into account by looking at their interpretation and engagements with the gender and national identities offered, since identities are socially constructed by interactive relationships between individuals and the social world (Davies 2003:13; MacNaughton, 2000:24). In this interactive relationship, it is important to understand the available discourses and individuals' engagement with them. MacNaughton (2000:24) emphasises that 'the child actively constructs meaning through "reading" and interpreting experiences, but is not free to construct any meanings or any identities she/he wants'.

This study also suggests that children do not create new meanings but rather they use and interpret the meanings that are available to them. In the process of learning, children engage with national and gender discourses that remind them to be good citizens of Atatürk's country. Girls are reminded to be future mothers and boys are reminded to be future fathers of the nation. None of the children in this study positioned themselves outside of these discourses as there were not any alternatives around them. However, they interpreted and reacted to the dominant discourses around them in different ways.

This study claims that the top-down construction of national identities in preschools in Turkey does not leave space for children to engage with the national discourses in different ways. In other words, children show little agency in interpreting these discourses or bringing their out-of-school experiences into classrooms since practices put them into the 'children of Atatürk' category. In addition, it can be said that there is a continuum between school and public life, which conveys and reinforces these

messages as shown in data chapters. On the other hand, the children were more aware of their gender identities and they showed more agency in their constructions of them. The existence of male and female categories in classroom settings lead children to make comparisons and to perform their roles. Although there was a male and female binary in both classrooms, the children engaged with these gender categories in more dynamic ways by reproducing, negotiating and resisting the meanings around them. However, it is hard to claim that children construct their identities through masculine boy and feminine girl categories to be future mothers and future fathers of the nation; rather they use these categories to position themselves and others.

At this point it is safe to say that sometimes children are not aware of their contribution in the construction of identities. As Thompson (2001:28) clarifies with regard to national identities:

Individuals may not be conscious of how they are actively involved in giving life to national identities when they categorise, but they do use these categories to explain, position and make sense. They do not therefore view these categories as their own personal inventions, rather they view them as information that is available for them to use in order to make sense of the actions of others.

However, what children are aware of is that they need to position themselves in power relations in order to be accepted. Davies (2003:21) pinpoints this: 'Each child must get its gender right, not only for itself to be seen as normal and acceptable within the terms of the culture, but it must get it right for others who will be interpreting themselves in relation to it as other.' The children in both classrooms

were aware of the necessity of doing their gender and national identities right; therefore, they mostly tried to stay within boundaries.

These boundaries are not drawn on only by preschools. As pointed out earlier, children's social relationships with their families and friends and the mass media have a great influence on their understanding of being national and gender subjects. They bring their understanding and prior knowledge into the preschool setting. For instance, teacher Fatma did not use reminders of Atatürk Nationalism in relation to 29 October Republic Day and 10 November, the anniversary of Atatürk's death, but some parents took this role in Nar. For instance, Bilal mentioned his family visit to Anitkabir, Murat read an Atatürk poem which his mother had taught him, and Ozan came to the class with a Turkish flag a couple of days after 29 October. In these instances, the children reminded their class that they are the children of Atatürk as their parents had reminded them. Similarly, in Mavi, in spite of teacher Zehra's efforts to reduce the power of hegemonic masculinity, Ahmet tried to regulate gender relations by exerting power on other femininities and masculinities because religious practices in his family life maybe reminded him to position women and men separately. For instance, he mentioned to me about Mawlid, a religious meeting where women gather and read parts from the Qur'an. He also tried to clarify that men cannot be present in these meetings. Although he could not explain the reason for men's absence in these meetings, Ahmet learns religious discourses in his home life which do not match with the discourses of Mavi.

In addition, children are also aware of which knowledge and experiences they should not bring to the classroom. None of the children in this study mentioned Atatürk in a negative way because the children were aware of the 'untouchable' place of Atatürk.

As Goffman (1959) explains, the setting influences what roles individuals play because each context has its own understandings and rules. For instance, Emine and Oğuz, as cousins, and Umut, Ömer and Esra, as friends from the same neighbourhood, stated that they normally played together in their neighbourhood, but I did not see them playing together in the classroom. When I engaged with the issue more closely, I realised that the boys did not want to play with the girls in the classroom since gender relations in the preschool and outside the preschool were different. The girls were keen to play together in the classroom because playing with a boy could give them power in the eyes of others. However, on the other hand there was a risk of boys being seen as weak if they played with girls. Therefore, the girls negotiated and accepted the boys' rejection, maybe because they did not want to lose their friends. However, for the boys it was more important to do their gender right since they did not want to make any negotiation with their girl friends.

In the above examples, the boys did not change their positions and the girls were open to playing different roles in the classroom settings. As the girls attempted to change the social practices of the classroom, some children tried to cross boundaries to explore other ways of beings. For instance, in this study some children used some strategies to rescue themselves from the strains of hegemonic masculinity to perform other ways of beings. No girls performed masculinities to gain power in this study as in Blaise's (2005) study, but both girls and boys used hegemonic masculinity as tools to perform femininities in this study. For instance, Esra entered the boys' play area by using Uğur's power. He was the ruler of gender relations in Nar. In other words, she gained power under the safe arms of hegemonic masculinity in the non-domestic area. Similarly, Egemen wanted to perform femininities. However, the dominance of the girls' power in the homecorner did not give him a chance to play the mother role.

Hence, Egemen developed a strategy whereby first he took the kitchen toys from the girls by using his masculine power and then he played his desired role.

As can be seen from these examples children move between different positions based on their interests and understandings. Children's actions cannot escape from structure but this does not mean that structures are not constructed by children's actions. Contrary practice, as Connell (1987:95) explores, can be turned against what constrains it; so structure can be a deliberate object of practice. Also in this sense structures are not fixed but fluid because 'structures are not social facts that exist apart from individuals, but sets of rules and resources that actors draw on, and hence reproduce, in social interaction' (Shilling, 1992:78). Hence identities are constructed through an inseparable relationship between structure and agency at a specific time and under certain conditions.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that children are reminded of Atatürk nationalism and they are also reminded to be future mothers or fathers of the nation by playing certain roles in preschools. However, these reminders are not suggested in the same ways in these settings. Therefore, it is important to understand the differences in order to identify the identity of the schools because the staff of Nar and Mavi have the same obligations to reproduce the practices of MoNE, but their understandings and beliefs influence the way they give a place to them in their practices. The children were Atatürk's children in both classrooms but the children in Mavi were more informed and engaged with the discourses because teacher Zehra believed in the community reinforced by MoNE. In Nar the children were offered these national identities as well but not in as much detail as in Mavi because of the obligations.

Both teachers' imagined communities were gendered but, while in Nar differences between gender roles were highly emphasised, in Mavi gender boundaries were sometimes blurred by the intervention of teacher Zehra.

I have discussed that in spite of these differences the children's voices were in line with the policy and practices of preschools. Their contribution in producing the same categories either consciously or unconsciously shows both their agency and how structures limit the discourses around them. Also, as well as schools, children's cultural, familial backgrounds are important in their identity construction; here they read meanings and compare them based on contexts. This reflexive process positions them and positioning oneself positions others. In spite of the boundaries of preschools, some children push their limits by creating strategies to try other ways of being. These strategies play a part in the construction of gender and national identities. Therefore, in order to understand the process of identity construction it is necessary to understand the relations between children's agency and structures.

Conclusion

In this last part I will draw a general conclusion to the thesis by summarising the answers of research questions and the ways in which I have addressed these questions. I will also discuss the contribution and limitations of the study and propose some recommendations for further studies.

Research Questions

Before summarising the answers of research questions I would like to restate them here:

1. How do gender and national identities manifest themselves in the preschool curriculum and practices in Turkey?
2. How do children use the discourses of preschools in the creation of their understanding of gender and national identities?

In order to answer the above questions this research conducted a case study in two preschool classrooms in Ankara. As discussed in Chapter 3, the case study was chosen to gain deeper understanding to explore multiple sources that influence identity construction. Researching two classrooms within their specific context, the case study method was helpful to explore the dynamic relation between actors and institutions in natural settings. Focusing on two classrooms also enabled me to reveal the differences between two different schools as both are bound to the same centralised system the Ministry of National Education (MoNE).

The study has focused on curriculum, materials, and teachers' implications in order to gain an understanding about the impact of schools' policies and practices in

shaping children's identities. Through an analysis of the preschool programmes and some relevant documents of MoNE, I tried to understand how gender and national discourses are framed in the curriculum. I used interview and observation methods to discuss how head teachers, their assistants and preschool teachers apply these rules and regulations in school and classroom practices. These methods enabled me to explore the contradictions and consistencies between theory and practice in the construction of identities because sometimes actors have agency to change or not apply curriculum and regulations in practices, but also sometimes actors do not have any choice but fulfil the requirements of the controlling body of MoNE. On the other side, I observed diverse interactions between children-teacher, children-children, children-assistant of teacher by being part of class practices. Through observing these relationships, building relationships with the classroom, and interviewing the children I had a chance to listen to children more closely.

Summary of Research Questions

Below I will try to summarise the answers to my research questions. First, I will present the role of policies and practices in the construction of children's identities, and then I will discuss how children perceive and use these policies and practices to construct their identities.

National and Gender Identities in Preschools

This section summarises the answer to the first research question: how do national gender identities manifest themselves in early years' policies and practices? First I discuss how the top-down regulations of MoNE are followed in Mavi and Nar. Then I will present the contradictions between MoNE's regulations and the teachers'

applications of them in the classroom settings. Finally I will briefly argue that it is not just MoNE's rules or teachers' own beliefs and understandings that influence teachers' practices; these are also influenced by the expectations of children's parents.

As discussed in the contextualisation chapter, MoNE is the main body that structures and controls school practices through top-down rules and regulations in the Turkish education system. The same chapter also shows that these top-down rules do not encourage diversities and differences, but rather they try to homogenise identities. The data from this study proves that these top-down regulations are mostly followed in Mavi and Nar. For instance, teacher Zehra used national identity reminders consistently in her practices by teaching poems and songs about Atatürk, and by organising visits to Anitkabir on national days, as the curriculum requires. Also the head teacher and the assistant of the head teacher in Mavi assigned importance to using reminders of Atatürk nationalism in the schools and the consistency between Mr. Cemal and Mrs. Deniz and teacher Zehra resulted in MoNE's rules and regulations being followed more closely in Mavi. The practices in Mavi were also in line with MoNE's gender neutral approach. Teacher Zehra and the head teacher, as well as the assistant of the head teacher in Mavi claimed in their interviews that education aims to provide gender equality. Teacher Zehra tried to equalise boys and girls through controlling boys' occupation of spaces and toys, encouraging boys and girls to play together, and not always prioritising boys' requests. She also proposed activities where the biological differences between girls and boys were emphasised such as doing puzzles of a naked boy and a girl and showing a 'how was I born?' cartoon. Also gender roles were exemplified through father and mother roles in a family structure, through which the children received diverse messages that showed

what girls/mothers and boys/fathers should do or not do via representations in discourses from books, teachers and teacher assistants. For instance, Fatma, the teacher in Nar, stated that children learn their gender roles through familial roles and therefore she reminded the children of their future roles in her practices. What gender equality means for the staff here is providing equal conditions and rights for both girls and boys but also accepting that there are certain roles for them. This approach does not contradict the Kemalist ideology of the Turkish education system since the roles of men and women are seen as different in the nation building process as I argued in Chapter 2.

However, the authoritarian structure of the Turkish education system gives a central role to teachers in organising their classroom activities as discussed in chapter 4; teachers decide all of the classroom activities and for the most part they do not take account of the children's ideas and suggestions. Teacher Fatma used the power of the teacher centred education system by applying her beliefs and understandings to classroom practices, even though they sometimes contradicted the MoNE's rules and regulations. For instance, teacher Fatma prioritised being in a powerful position and she did not intervene in unequal power relations related to gender relations in the classroom setting. Consequently, this approach gave power to hegemonic masculinity and the existing gendered relations were reproduced in Nar more than in Mavi. Also teacher Fatma did not attend the national day ceremonies on 29 October and 10 November, despite the fact that this is required by MoNE. Moreover teacher Fatma did not use the reminders of Atatürk nationalism in her practices because she is not a strict follower of Turkish national values any more due to her personal relations with the Turkish state, as discussed in Chapter 5. The head teacher and head teacher assistant in Nar did not prioritise national identity reminders either because

they did not believe in conveying the messages of MoNE; rather they thought that they were duty-bound to apply the discourses of Atatürk nationalism. Although they did not express their political thoughts clearly, this view was closely related to their distance from the Kemalist ideology. This contradictory approach also gave teacher Fatma space to not strictly follow the rules and regulations of MoNE.

As discussed above, MoNE's regulations and teachers' own understandings and beliefs construct classroom practices. In addition to these, this study found that the expectations of children's parents influence classroom practices. For instance, when I talked about the colour division of the uniforms in Nar, teacher Fatma stated that this decision was taken by the children's parents and she accepted this decision because she said she could not change the parents' perspective. In another example, teacher Fatma made a craft activity on 29 October, the Republic Day, which involved hanging pictures on a pinboard located in the corridor of the school, which parents can see. Teacher Fatma said that she felt an obligation to do these kinds of activities because when parents see other classroom craft works, they ask her for similar craft work. In Mavi, teacher Zehra also tried not to conflict with the parents' desires. For instance when Nisa cried because her mother said that if she talked to boys Allah would turn her to stone, teacher Zehra said that she had said to Nisa that there is no problem with playing with boys, they are all friends. However, after discussing the issue with Nisa's mother, teacher Zehra did not talk about this issue with Nisa anymore because her parents did not want her to be close to the boys.

As can be seen from the above discussion, there are different actors in preschool settings that shape classroom practices. The teachers were at the centre of controlling the classroom activities in both classrooms. However it was not possible for the

teachers to drift freely from the rules and regulations of MoNE and the cultural codes of Turkish society.

Children's Understandings of Gender and National Identities

The second research question in this study concerns the children's engagement with gender and the national discourses of preschools in the construction of their identities.

Although preschool practices are not the only sources that children use in the construction of their identities, most of the children's understandings were consistent with the identities given by the preschools. As shown in chapter 5, this study found that children have knowledge about being citizens of Atatürk's country but not about being citizens of the Turkish nation. Due to the absence of discourses about Turkishness, and other nationalities in classroom settings, the children engaged with the discourses of Atatürk nationalism. As chapter 5 demonstrates, most of the children defined the country they lived in as Atatürk's country and the Turkish flag as Atatürk's flag. In particular in Mavi, due to teacher Zehra's constant usage of reminders, the children praised Atatürk by citing poems and singing songs. None of the children made negative remarks about Atatürk in Nar or Mavi. This could be interpreted as the children's awareness of the 'expectations' of the Turkish education system in following the 'regulations'.

This awareness of children with regard to the 'necessity' of following the rules of the classroom was also evident in constructing their gender identities. As chapter 4 shows, the children used gendered discourses in their classroom practices when they positioned themselves in gender categories. For the children, the girls' and boys' categories were not just binary but also opposite groups in both classrooms. For

instance, teacher Zehra's example of boys and girls as opposites in Opposite Words play was used by Melike in her interview when she talked about toys that boys and girls play with. Moreover, Esra in Nar compared boys and girls as good and bad by using teacher Fatma's comments on girls and boys when she did not let Umut become involved in the girls' play.

Although most of the children reproduced the dominant discourses, it is not possible to claim that all of the children read and understood the national and gender discourses in the same way. As discussed in chapter 5, for instance, while some of the children mentioned Atatürk in an enthusiastic way, some did not: Esma from Mavi stated that Atatürk was the creator of the country and she loved Atatürk so much. Ozan from Nar said, 'if we do not remember Atatürk, God punishes us'. However some of the children did not say much about Atatürk when they saw the pictures of him in their interviews.

The children were aware of what the given identities of the preschools were and the possible difficulties and challenges that they could encounter if they did not perform these positions. Therefore, the children tended to stay within the boundaries because of the risk of being excluded. In terms of gender identities, category maintenance work was strong in both settings in that the children tried to perform gendered positions by policing each other. For instance, when Selim chose pink dough, Bahadır announced to the classroom that Selim had chosen a girl's colour. This intervention led Selim to change his choice because he was afraid of being outside his gender category. Similarly, Uğur in Nar stated that he could not play with girls because otherwise his boy friends would not like him.

On the other hand, although some of the children were aware that there was a risk of being excluded, they tried to find ways to perform other ways of being. For instance, in Nar, Egemen took a risk by playing a mother role and using kitchen toys and Esra in Nar used her power to enter the area dominated by the boys by negotiating with the ruler of hegemonic masculinity Uğur.

Also the children were aware that each context had different dynamics and power relations in terms of gender relations. As shown in Chapter 4, cousins Oğuz and Emin stated that they played together in their houses but not in their classroom. Similarly, while Ömer, Umut and Esra played together in their neighbourhood in the classroom Ömer and Umut did not play with Esra. The boys in these examples did not want to be seen with their girl friends in the classroom settings because in the words of the boys ‘boys play with boys’.

These findings show that there is not a one-way process whereby the children passively follow given discourses; rather they reproduce, resist and interpret the discourses around them. For instance, teacher Zehra aimed to intervene in the power of hegemonic masculinity to avoid unequal power relations, but this did not stop the children from reproducing the power relations, as I discussed in chapter 4 where the children changed their play groups in their free play time in Mavi. In spite of teacher Fatma’s lack of intervention in gendered relations, some of the children tried other ways of being to challenge the gendered norms. Esra and Egemen tried to cross gender boundaries by using hegemonic masculinity as a tool to enter the boys’ and girls’ dominated areas respectively.

The Contribution to the Existing Literature

In this section, I will present how this study contributes to the Turkish literature by emphasising children's agency in their identity construction; to studies on gender in preschool settings by highlighting different ways of performing gender roles in relation to hegemonic masculinity and also the limitations of teachers' own beliefs and ideas about gender identities while applying the practices of the central education system; to the literature on children's national identity by revealing the importance of a national hero in the construction of national identities, which national discourses are given via banal reminders.

Many of the studies about children's gender and national identities in relation to the Turkish education system have not involved children; rather they have been focused on how identities are offered by policies and practices (Kancı&Altınay, 2011; Esen & Bağlı, 2002; Gürşimşek & Günay, 2005). Therefore, this study contributes to the Turkish literature by bringing children's agency in their identity construction in preschool settings in Turkey to the fore.

This study also extends our knowledge about the dynamics of gender relations in relation to hegemonic masculinity in early years settings through demonstrating that girls benefit from the 'advantages' of hegemonic masculinity in performing their 'feminine' roles in 'masculine' areas such as the block area and through building close relationships with boys who perform hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, some of the boys perform hegemonic masculinity in entering the girls' areas such as the home corner. By revealing this, the study tells a similar story about the gender performances in classrooms as Danby's (1998) study, which states that girls do not perform but visit the discourse of hegemonic masculinity. This differs from

Blaise's (2005) study, in which he points out that girls can perform hegemonic masculinity.

This research also supports the findings of previous studies proposing the role of teachers' own values in shaping gender relations in preschool settings (Browne, 2004; MacNaughton, 2000; Blaise & Andrew, 2005). This study contributes to these studies by noting that although teachers' own values are important, a centralised education system can detract from the personal accounts of teachers to some extent.

Moreover, this study contributes to the national identity literature (Dockett & Cusack, 2003; Howard & Gill, 2001; Lappalainen, 2009) by emphasising the vital place of a national hero in identity construction. Having Atatürk is more important than having culturally common traditions in the construction of the national self for children. Furthermore, through highlighting how preschool children in this study perceive the 'others' as enemies of Atatürk, the study is different from the previous literature (Lappalainen, 2009; Zembylas, 2013), showing that children make the distinction between 'us' and 'others' in relation to their nation and other nations. Apparently, the children in the study make the distinction between us and others in relation to the friends and enemies of a national hero.

The Limitations of the Study

In this section I will talk about the limitations of the study with respect to the method and content of the research.

Method

The design of this study combines several research methods but my limited experience as a researcher brought some difficulties in using the interview method in the fieldwork. After listening to the recordings of the interviews I realised that I had

missed opportunities to ask further questions because it was difficult for me to encourage the interviewees to explain their thoughts further. In addition, the data gathered from the children's interviews could have been quantified because the children gave short and similar answers to some questions. Therefore, it might have been useful to categorise the children's answers in order to clearly present the similar points that the children made.

Also studying in one country and conducting research in another limited further investigation due to time and financial constraints. Accessing schools and obtaining consent took a lot of time in this study. Consequently, less time was spent in the classroom settings. If the time management had been made more efficient, deeper data could have been gathered.

The insider/outsider dynamics of the research caused some problems in building a relationship with the research participants. As discussed in Chapter 3, the staff in the schools did not have any experiences of hosting researchers in their settings and due to this unfamiliarity they tended to see me as a trainee teacher rather than a researcher. Consequently they expected me to contribute to their activities and help them by engaging with the children. In addition, they also wanted me to benefit from my experiences as a PhD student in the UK. These expectations were barriers to conducting my research by having a researcher role because due to the teachers approaching me as an adult who could control the children, the children tended to see me as a teacher too. It was difficult to explain my researcher role to some of the children, who tended to see adults as authority more than the other children. Hence, some of the children did not feel comfortable explaining their thoughts without feeling adult authority.

Also my background and familiarity with the context might have had some influence on the collection and interpretation of the data. Although I tried to maintain a reflective approach, some of my preconceptions may have limited my interactions with the research environment and I may have read the research participants' views in a restricted way because of my assumptions as discussed in Chapter 3.

In addition, language was a barrier in presenting the data in this study. Sometimes it was not possible to find equivalent words when translating from Turkish to English. Also translating cultural issues via language was difficult in some cases because it is not possible to discuss the cultural context with all of its dimensions. Therefore, it is inevitable that some relevant issues could not be discussed due to these limitations.

Content

It is unfortunate that the study did not discuss how religion influences gender and national identities in schools. Undoubtedly the place of Islam in the Turkish context plays a crucial role in the construction of Turkish women and men in education but the available data was not sufficient because of the invisibility of religion in early education policies and practices due to 'secular' education system.

Recommendations for Further Studies

This study shows that identity reminders around children draw boundaries between particular subject positions and that children move between different positions. Hence, further research should be undertaken to explore why some children take risks to push gender and national boundaries in their identity construction but some not. Also it can be investigated in which conditions this risk taking occurs in preschools and what motivations children have to try other ways of beings. A more

in-depth study participating a classroom rather than two by following particular students over the entire school year which they spend in preschools, may allow researcher to present more detailed analysis of identity construction, and how this process change over time.

The ideas about gender and national identities presented in this study are bound up with the school context. A potential next step can be focusing on both school and home context to explore any continuities and clashes between these contexts and how these interactions appear in children's identities. As the findings suggest in this study, children bring their home experiences to the classrooms and vice versa. Also it can be explored how religion manifests itself in preschool and home settings because, although Turkish education system has a secular character, as mentioned earlier, religion is an important part of Turkish society which regulates gender relations by working with nationalism. These home and school contexts can provide important information for discussing the intersection of gender, nationalism and religion in children's identity construction and the way in which home and school form a continuum for children's learning (or not).

Summary of Conclusion

In this part I have tried to summarise the answers of my research questions through discussing them in two groups. First of all, I have introduced the answers of the research question asking to the impact of the representation ways of gender and national discourses in early education policies and practices on shaping children's identities. Here, I presented the findings related mainly to curriculum and teachers. In the second part, as my second research question requires, I have focused on the

children's' own agency in negotiating with those policies and practices to construct their identities.

Then, I underlined the contributions of the study to Turkish literature and the studies of gender and nationalism identities in preschool settings. Then, I talked about the limitations of the study, I pointed out missing points of this study in terms of methods and content. At the final section, I propose that religion and outside experience of children should be the focus along with gender and nationalism to understand children's identity construction for a further research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary

ECEP- Early Childhood Education Programme: This programme is prepared by MoNE for preschool classrooms. This document introduces the aims of preschool and then it lists developmental areas (cognitive, language, social and emotional, physical, self-care skills) by explaining children's abilities in these particular areas based on their age. It also gives tasks of annual, monthly and daily plans for teachers.

EYAB- Early Years Activity Book: Activity book is prepared by MoNE to offer classroom activities that preschool teachers can use in their plans. In this book there are forty activities in relation to developmental areas which are introduced by giving the aims, materials and different version of each activity.

HT- Head Teacher: Head teacher assesses and controls school staff and necessities based on laws and regulations of MoNE. Being teacher is the condition to become a head teacher; hence in addition to management duty, head teacher can also teach in classrooms.

HTA- Head Teacher Assistant: Head teachers assign duties like public relations, security, cleaning, staff and student relations to the assistants. As head teachers, they have to be a teacher to become an assistant of head teacher and also they can have teaching role.

İlköğretim: This term refers 8 years compulsory education as the combination of primary school (5 years) and lower secondary school education (3 years). However this system was replaced with 4+4+4 system in 2013.

İlkokul:İlkokul refers primary school education only. This term was used until 1997 until 8 years compulsory education started but when 12 years compulsory education 4+4+4 system started in 2013 due to primary and lower secondary education was separated, again primary school education started to be called as ilkokul.

İmam Hatip schools:Basically these schools are for training imams, who works in mosques, and also who wanted to be educated about religion mainly Islam. These schools have similar curriculum with normal lower secondary and secondary education however, they also have lessons specifically focus on Islam and its practices.

Appendix 2: Lists of key informants of Nar and Mavi

NAR

Pseudonyms, age, gender of research participants of Nar	Role	Date of Interview
İsmail (58, m)	Head teacher	14.11.13
Cemal (45, m)	Assistant of head teacher	12.11.13
Fatma (44, f)	Preschool classroom teacher	25.10.13 13.11.13
Elif (40,f)	Assistant of teacher	-
Esra (5,f)	Student	30.10.13
Mehmet (5,m)	“	30.10.13
Umut (5,m)	“	31.10.13 – 11.11.13
Murat (5,m)	“	31.10.13
Can (5,m)	“	31.10.13
Ali (5,m)	“	01.11.13
Sevda (5,f)	“	01.11.13
Egemen (5,m)	“	01.11.13
Ozan (5,m)	“	04.11.13
Hilal (5,f)	“	04.11.13
Azra (5,f)	“	04.11.13
Mert (5,m)	“	05.11.13
Oğuz (5,m)	“	05.11.13
Barkın (5,m)	“	05.11.13
Emine (5,f)	“	06.11.13
Cansu (5,f)	“	07.11.13
Cem (4,m)	“	07.11.13
Seldar (5,m)	“	11.11.13
Uğur (5,m)	“	11.11.13
Bilal (5,m)	“	12.11.13
Yağmur (5,f)	“	12.11.13
Ömer (5,m)	“	12.11.13

MAVİ

Pseudonyms, age, gender of research participants of Mavi	Role	Date of Interview
Ahmet (57, m)	Head teacher	07.03.14
Deniz (38,f)	Assistant of head teacher	05.03.14
Zehra (58,f)	Preschool classroom teacher	10.03.14 12.03.14
Sevgi (42, f)	Assistant of teacher	-
Melike (5,f)	Student	25.02.14
Serdar (5,m)	“	25.02.14
Aydın (5,m)	“	25.02.14
Burak (5,m)	“	25.02.14
Ahmet (5.m)	“	26.02.14
Seda (5,f)	“	26.02.14
Arda (5,m)	“	26.02.14
Zeynep (5,f)	“	27.02.14
Ulaş (5,m)	“	27.02.14
Bahadır (5,m)	“	27.02.14
Nida (5,f)	“	27.02.14
Bora (5,m)	“	27.02.14
Tolga (5,m)	“	28.02.14
Koray (5,m)	“	28.02.14
Esmâ (5,f)	“	28.02.14
Mustafa (5,m)	“	04.03.14
Berna (5,f)	“	04.03.14
Özlem (5,f)	“	04.03.14
Çağrı (5,m)	“	05.03.14
Selim (5,m)	“	06.03.14
Engin (5,m)	“	06.03.14
Eyüp (5,m)	“	06.03.14
Arif (5,m)	“	10.03.14
Hakan (5,m)	“	10.03.14
Olca (5,m)	“	11.03.14

Appendix 3: Parent informed consent

My name is Nehir Gundogdu and I am a second year research student funded by Ministry of National Education. I obtained consents of head teacher and assistant of head teacher and teachers of school, and I am writing to seek your consent for your child to be involved in a study related to children's identities in Nar (Mavi).

This research focuses on the relation between preschool settings and children in the construction of identities. I will participate classroom approximately 5 weeks without doing any special activity. During this period I will make observations and interviews with the teacher and children which involve audio recording. I assure you that subject identities will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms. All the audio recordings will be used for the research. If you want to withdraw your child from the study, you are free to discontinue to research at any time.

If you have any further inquiry about research, please feel free to contact with me via email or phone. If you are willing to let your child to participate this study, please sign this letter and return it to the teacher or assistant of teacher.

The names of parent and child:

Signature:

Date:

Nehir Gundodgu

nehirgundogdu@gmail.com

Tel: 0533 430 15 94

Appendix 4: Teachers' semi-structured interviews questions

Questions about gender

Do you think early years curriculum and practices are important in children's construction of gender identity?

Do you think there are differences between the presentation of men and women in early years curriculum? Then, how are they presented?

Have you ever studied about gender in your teacher training education?

Have The Ministry of National Education or your school ever arranged any course or training about gender in early years education?

Do you think there are 'appropriate' gender roles for women and men?

In your opinion, how can gender roles be represented in curriculum and practices?

Do you do something special about it (refer to previous question) in your practices?

Do you think, what children think about gender identities?

Questions about nationalism

What kind of activities do you have to do about Turkish nationalism, Atatürk's nationalism?

How are other nationalities represented in curriculum and practices?

Do you think nationalism takes priority when you define yourself, does it come from before other things like your religion, gender, race?

What does it mean to be Turkish and non-Turkish for you?

Do you do something special about your ideas in the classroom activities?

Appendix 5: Interview questions of head teachers and assistant of head teachers

What is the role of early childhood education in Turkish education system?

Is Turkish education system promoting gender equality?

Do you think there are differences between the presentation of men and women in Turkish education system?

What is the role of Ministry of National education in children's construction of national identities?

What do you think about children's ideas of symbols, activities around them that aim to awake national identities?

Appendix 6: Transcript of Fatma teacher's interview - 13 November 2013

Nehir (N): How is Turkish nationalism represented in early childhood education?

Teacher Fatma (F): Before this government, Atatürk as concept is need to be emphasised, but now there is not any necessity to do this. For instance even subjects like nature were related to Atatürk to encourage children to love him. But now it is not as before you know.

N: You mean in the past when we talk about nationalism in schools, was it mostly about Atatürk?

F: Not exactly, we can say being nationalist means loving our homeland and nation. In fact, custom and traditions are important to define oneself but unfortunately, this is finishing in schools as well. I think if society care about traditions and customs, it means being nationalist.

N: Being nationalist means having traditions and customs?

F: Yes, I think it is. In today's society, schools do not give importance to these values any more.

N: How can schools play a part to give these values?

F: When we say nationalism, it should mean respect and love. In our classroom, I try to teach children to respect each other, love each other because if we explain belonging a nation related to how people behave and respect each other in society, we fulfil our duty for this age group.

N: How are national identities given in the education system?

F: Unfortunately, there are no practices about nationalism. But we make efforts by ourselves to maintain the importance of national values because teachers as people who drive progress must take up this mantle. To protect some national values, teachers have to make an effort. But some of 'our' teachers do not care about these

things anymore. Nobody says why you are not doing this or that because there is no effort now. There are national celebrations like Republic Day but now it has been proposed that these celebrations are halted. They removed the T.C (Turkish Republic abbreviation) symbol from school titles and they have removed the student oath. The student oath was what bound all schools all around the country together. It was a nationalistic thing but they get rid of it. It motivated children to be honest, and hardworking. Removing the oath hampers our national sentiments.

N: Are you saying Atatürk nationalism is not strong as it was before?

F: Yes, it was different. Nationalistic ideas are not strong as before.

N: How are other nationalities represented in curriculum and practices?

F: For instance when we look at old wars, allied powers Armenia, France and England. Despite, they gave too much harm to our country, they are shown as they were right, Turkey was guilty in books now.

N: In preschool education?

F: There is nothing in preschool about these issues. We talk about other countries but when we teach our country like ‘our country is Turkey’. We also mention the name of countries like Germany, France etc, to teach countries’ names. Our education system is teacher-centred therefore, teachers' ideas, opinions and working style are vital. In other words, nobody tell you ‘you should do or do not this. Teachers initiative. It is my initiative to talk about other countries.

N: What about curriculum?

F: No, not in preschool. Just teaching Turkish flag as nation’s flag.

N: What about other nationalities in Turkey, do they take place in policies and practices?

F: We sometimes hear from children about what kind of thinking their families have, which nationality they belong. We try to emphasise our truths because this country is our and we do not have any other country. We do not emphasise other nationalities,

not in this ages. Later on you can understand where they come from because they will be conscious about it. Now, children speak where their families come from but they do not know what they mean.

N: I would like hear about your personal ideas about national belonging for instance, do you think nationalism takes priority when you define yourself, does it come from before other things like your religion, gender, race?

F: If I feel I am a human, if a country protect my rights, if I have social rights, if government protect me and my family yes it can be prior thing for me. Religion, ethnicity, language are not important for me. Everybody has rights as citizens and if state can secure your rights, then nationalism becomes important. But I think in our country they do not protect their citizens. If you have equal rights, earning money, having free health services, I think these create nationalism. Education, health and law. In this country we do not have these elements therefore I cannot defence my own country. For me, values are important if there are not values, nation is not important as well.

N: What does it mean to be Turkish and non-Turkish for you?

F: It does not mean something important. When people are less respected and less loved, they lose their desire to live in a country. Turkey, Germany or any other places it does not matter. For instance I have a disabled child and I have concerns what will happen to my child therefore this country is not important for me. These all about national feelings. Nationalism meanhaving good health and education systems, and sharing custom and traditions. You cannot mention about nationalism if a country does not have all these.

N: Do you think Turkish nation need to be protected by public education?

F: Our education system had changed a lot and it is not possible to keep same national values with these constant changes. Education is like basic foundation like a structure. If it does not have some standards and continue to change consistently to find a true way, the generation between these processes become nation' bleeding scar. Education is the thing to spread nationalism but nobody knows how to do this. Teachers do not know. They (she means MoNE)createcurriculum and everybody

follow it like Pavlov's dogs. Everybody is afraid to do something different from the programme. I think people find this easy and they do not want to change it. Our education system is very comfortable in fact. For instance instead of solving problems of for instance a problematic child, the method is excluding this child. There is no communication with parents. With these problems we could not talk about Turkish nationalism. Therefore, they say we are being Americans. Turkish identity is losing power by aiming to join European Union. They say America manage our country but I think not just America other countries also control Turkey because our country's geopolitical position. In history books, foreign powers after independence war said 'we could not beat you in the war but we will beat you slowly'. I think weakening national ties in recent Turkey relates to foreign powers' effect. They exercise power on government even the government do not want to follow their rules.

N: What about national symbols around children in schools?

F: There are some symbols in schools but you cannot awake the national feelings by pictures, songs etc. The obligations make reverse effect. For instance national ceremonies are compulsory but it does not enthuse national feelings. I think making something compulsory effects people feelings in a negative way. These kinds of feelings are in people's hearts. In fact, I said it relates to people's hearts but actually managers play part in awakening national feelings as well.

N: Do you do something special about your ideas in the classroom activities?

F: I have done before but after my child have health problems, I did not have time to do something extra. Before, in national days I was active. I did many celebration especially for Republic Day and 23 Children's Day. After ceremonies, children were very happy but I am feeling distanced about these national ceremonies. We had health problems but the state did not provide any support. Consequently, my national feelings died now. You do not have to pay for health services in Europe and they support disabled people and their families. When I come to class, I am not a happy teacher because I have problems at home. I cannot say I am loving my country. Not just soil which you live on also who you live with is important. When people do not share, what the meaning is then.

N: What about children's ideas about symbols, activities around them to awake national belonging?

F: They come from home with one thing: 'Atatürk beat the enemies'. In fact, it is not true, it should be Atatürk and his friends. I think Atatürk was nationalist. Now there are many bad things happening but nobody doing anything to stop as Atatürk did before with his friends.

N: Children?

F: They do not know much about national festivals, and Atatürk. Parents raise like them as sheep. Not like Europe. Parents do not listen children or engage with them closely. When they do not listen then children do not listen others as well. Last year I told about Atatürk, wars, foreign countries and one child said 'not Atatürk but Allah saved us'. Atatürk take his power from Allah but religion and nationalism are separated in Turkey. They (she means foreign powers) try to separate us. Our language is Turkish by laws. If we change it, do not talk about Turkish nationalism then. They can speak whichever language they want but they want to write it into the education system (she refers to Kurds and the Kurdish language), they (foreign powers) want to change the country's system and structure. It's dangerous. The country is called Turkey, why do they not find undiscovered soil instead of wanting a place in Turkey. The Turkish nation is a people who live on Turkish soil and it stems from the Ottoman Empire. There are all sorts of people, Armenian, Kurdish. It does not matter where you come from, the important thing is to look after your country, and only if you do good things for your country can you talk about nationalism.

N: Finally, what do Turkish education system expect from students?

F: There is not definite things that system want to achieve. Mostly it relies on teachers. Teachers can teach whatever they want. Teacher' perspective is very important. If a teacher for instance is a religious person, not organize trip to Anıtkabir, in national days not prepare anything. We see this kind of things. Nationalism matches with Atatürk nationalism. There are two groups in Turkey: religious part and Kemalist part. Teachers take position based on these and children are shaped by these as well. All in all there is no nationalist country, there are

nationalist people. Country is a soil and it may exist today but tomorrow it may not exist.

Appendix 7: Transcript of Aydın's (m, 5 from Mavi) interview - 25 February 2014

Aydın (A): Why do you want to talk with us?

Nehir (N): I am making a research about children and their interests.

A: For instance, I like playing with toys, watching television, playing games on the phone and I sometimes go to Adana (a city of Turkey) with my mum.

N: Nice. There is a box here and there are some items²⁴ inside of it. I want you to pick one item and then we will talk about it and what it reminds to you. Then we will do the same thing for the other items. Shall we start?

A: Yes!

(Then he picked up toy car.)

N: Do you have cars?

A: Yes, many! Particularly one which you can charge.

N: Which toys do you play in your classroom?

A: With wooden toys, animals, block corner, people.

N: Do you play in the homecorner?

A: Homecorner is for girls, what can a boy do there?

N: You do not play there?

A: Girls do not let us!

²⁴There were four items in the box: a toy car, a doll, a picture of Atatürk, a Turkish flag.

N: But actually you want to play there?

A: Yes, I want to. We make plans to play in homecorner.

N: What kind of plans?

A: For example, traps.

N: Traps?

A: Beating girls from their back and then confusing their minds but sometimes we cannot do traps.

N: Why do not you play together instead?

A: Because, it is not for boys.

N: You think like this?

A: I think homecorner is for boys as well. For instance, if a boy is single, he can cook his food by himself.

N: Have you tried to cook?

A: I can cook egged bread, my father taught me. Pizza.

N: Nice. Do you want to pick other one?

(He took the Turkish flag.)

A: Turkish flag!

N: What does it remind to you?

A: I have a disabled aunt, Meliha and she is a famous painter.

N: And?

A: And she helped me to do some Atatürk's pictures. Also I know what Atatürk did very well.

N: Turkish flag?

A: I see Turkish flag everywhere in schools, in shopping malls.

N: Why do you think it is everywhere?

A: Because everywhere is done by Atatürk. Before us Atatürk was born.

(Staying silent for a while.)

N: What does it mean to be Turkish?

A: We are Turkish.

N: What about non-Turkish?

A: I do not know.

N: Do you know which country do you live in?

A: In Turkey.

N: What is this flag for in your thinking?

A: It is for remembering Atatürk. The things like killing enemies, showing true way is definitely Atatürk.

(Then we moved to the next item which was the doll.)

N: Do you have babies Aydın?

A: No.

N: What do you have to play with?

A: For instance puzzles, chess. I have a puzzle like Turkish map and my mother want me to buy the world map.

N: Nice. You said you do not have any babies, why is that?

A: Because all you can do with them are moving legs and changing clothes. Not funny at all.

N: Do you have any friends who play with dolls?

A: Yes, but unfortunately two of them are in my neighbourhood. Duru and Cansu.

N: Not in your classroom?

A: We are 7 girls and 18 boys in our classroom.

N: What do you play together?

A: We play in home and block corners. Of course they (he means girls) need some blocks as food and they have forks, knives, ovens, make up corners and bank corners. Of course in bank corner me, Burak and Çağrı use to sell something... Let's move to other one.

(He picked up the picture of Atatürk)

A: Atatürk.

N: Do you know who is Atatürk?

A: Atatürk is a person who protect us.

N: Protecting from what?

A: Enemies.

N: What does this picture remind to you?

A: I know a poem about Atatürk. 'Atatürk, I love you as much as I love the bread I eat. My mother, my father and my grandmother love you as well. There is a nation who loves you. You are the one who killed the enemies and showed us the right path!'

N: Where do you learn this poem?

A: Our teacher said whoever memorises this poem will get a big gift. Our gifts were chocolate and candy.

N: And you memorised it.

A: Yes, it is easy. I could not memorize it the first day but I memorised it the next day.

N: Why do you think your teacher wanted you to memorise a poem about Atatürk?

A: Because, we give too much importance to Atatürk. Moreover, I went to his grave, war areas and his home. We ate our lunch in front of his house.

N: This was your school trip, wasn't it?

A: Yes. We went with one or two classrooms and with our teachers but not all of friends came.

N: How was Anıtkabir?

A: It was nice. I saw Ataturk's guns, bullets, swords. He had them to kill enemies. Even he created everything. Things around us as well.

(Then he asked me to go back to the classroom and we finished the interview.)